INSIDE THE NRA'S SECRET COUNCIL
DAVE ZIRIN ON THE PRISON-ATHLETIC COMPLEX

The Progressive

April 2013

Global Warming

Holding Obama's Feet to the Fire

By Jason Mark

An Interview with David Suzuki

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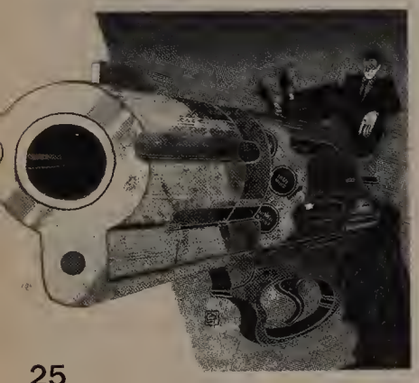

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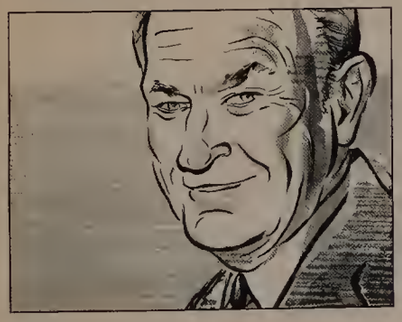

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This issue of *The Progressive*, Volume 77, Number 4, went to press on March 5.

Editorial correspondence should be addressed to *The Progressive*, 409 East Main Street, Madison, WI 53703, or to editorial@progressive.org. Unsolicited manuscripts will be returned only if accompanied by sufficient postage.

Subscription rates: U.S.- One year $32; Two years $52; Canadian- One year $42; Two years $72; Foreign- One year $47, Two years $82. Libraries and institutions- One year (Domestic) $50; (Canadian) $67; (Foreign) $98. Send all subscription orders and correspondence to: The Progressive, P.O. Box 392, Oregon, IL 61061. For problems with subscriptions, call toll-free 1-800-827-0555.

The Progressive is published monthly. Copyright ©2012 by *The Progressive*, Inc., 409 East Main Street, Madison, WI 53703. Telephone: (608) 257-4626. Publication number (ISSN 0033-0736). Periodicals postage paid at Madison, WI, and additional mailing offices. Printed in U.S.A. *The Progressive* is indexed in the Readers' Guide to Periodical Literature, Magazine Index, Alternative Press Index, Book Review Index, Environmental Periodicals Bibliography, Media Review Index, Academic Abstracts, Magazine Article Summaries, and Social Science Source. *The Progressive* is available on microfilm from University Microfilms, 300 North Zeeb Road, Ann Arbor, MI 48106, and on compact discs and other optical, magnetic, or electronic media from the H.W. Wilson Company, 950 University Avenue, Bronx, NY 10452. For permission to photocopy material from *The Progressive*, please contact the Copyright Clearance Center, Customer Service, 222 Rosewood Drive, Danvers, MA 01923; (978) 750-8400.

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Postmaster: Send address changes to: *The Progressive*, 409 E. Main St., Madison, WI 53703.

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Editor's Note Matthew Rothschild

Saluting Pfc. Manning

I salute Private First Class Bradley Manning.

I salute him for withstanding the hideous mistreatment he has faced in the 1,000 days he's been confined, often in solitary, sometimes naked, enduring sleep and sensory deprivation.

I salute him for being a soldier of conscience who was outraged by what he saw in Iraq, especially by the video of the Apache helicopter attack on two Reuters journalists and on the van that came to assist them.

I salute him for recognizing, and agonizing over, "the seemingly delightful bloodlust" of the helicopter crew, as he put it, who "seemed similar to a child torturing ants with a magnifying glass."

I salute him for trying to get the word out, first by contacting *The Washington Post* and *The New York Times*, but when they turned a deaf ear, then going to WikiLeaks.

I salute him for exonerating WikiLeaks by testifying that they didn't pressure him to divulge the documents.

I salute him for trying, in his words, to "spark a debate" about U.S. policy in Iraq and Afghanistan.

I salute him for taking responsibility for his actions, and for pleading guilty to ten charges that could put him in prison for twenty years, without plea bargaining at all.

I salute him for standing up for what is right, no matter the consequences.

In short, I salute Private First Class Bradley Manning for being one brave soldier, one brave citizen.

But I don't salute John Brennan, President Obama's choice for CIA director and the mastermind of the Administration's drone policy.

At his confirmation hearing, he excreted octopus ink to dodge questions and obfuscate the issues.

For example, responding to a question on the need for full disclosure, he said: "We need to optimize transparency and at the same time optimize secrecy."

He also tried to assure the Senate that the government is "very disciplined and very judicious" in the way it makes its selections of whom to kill.

Well, then, what about the drone killing of sixteen-year-old Abdulrahman Al-Awlaki, the son of cleric Anwar Al-Awlaki? What was so "disciplined" and "judicious" about the rubbing out of this U.S. citizen born in Colorado? Killed two weeks after a drone bumped off his father, Abdulrahman was no high-ranking Al Qaeda operative. (In justifying his murder, Robert Gibbs, former Obama press secretary, said, chillingly, that Abdulrahman should have had "a far more responsible father.")

After a welcome disruption by members of CodePink who denounced Brennan and got ejected from the hearing, he said that there is a "misunderstanding" about "the care we take" and—he added obscenely—"the agony we go through" in deciding who to kill.

Compare his "agony" to the agony of the families of the innocent people he's killed with his drones. His comment was the ultimate in the category of "This is going to hurt me more than it hurts you."

This month, our longtime interviewer David Barsamian gives us his fascinating conversation with David Suzuki. A leading Canadian broadcaster and activist, Suzuki has done more than anyone else to educate his nation about the toxic threats facing the planet. He also happens to be the ideal interviewee, as I found out a few years ago when I spoke to him on Progressive Radio. As you'll see, he's engaging, serious, and funny all rolled into one. ◆

No Comment

How Not to Deal with a Patient's Racist Dad

Tonya Battle, an African American nurse who has worked at the Hurley Medical Center in Flint, Michigan, for twenty-five years, was taken off a case last fall for an unusual reason. She was tending to a baby in the neonatal intensive care unit when the baby's father, who had a swastika on his arm, insisted on a white nurse. A note on the patient's clipboard read: "Please, No African American Nurses to care for [redacted] Baby per Dad's request. Thank you." Battle sued for racial discrimination, and the medical center settled with her in February.

Guns and Gonads

Illinois state representative Jim Sacia, a Republican from the northwestern part of the state, had no sympathy for Chicagoans and their "runaway gun problem" when he opposed a gun control measure during a recent debate. He offered this analogy: "You folks in Chicago want me to get castrated because your families are having too many kids."

Room for Only One God in Newtown

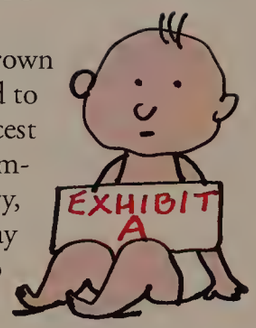
The Reverend Rob Morris of Newtown's Christ the King Lutheran Church was reprimanded by the head of his synod, Matthew Harrison, for participating in the community service in Newtown, Connecticut, after the mass shooting there. Harrison said Morris risked giving "the impression that our differences with respect to who God is, who Jesus is, how he deals with us, and how we get to heaven, really don't matter in the end." Morris apologized, as requested. Then Harrison apologized. "I handled it poorly," he said. "I increased the pain of a hurting community."

Prison for Murdering Zygotes?

Nine Republican Iowa state lawmakers in early February introduced a bill that would classify all abortions as murder, including "use of abortion-inducing drugs." It equated aborting a "zygote" with murdering "an infant, a teenager, or an adult."

Readers are invited to submit No Comment items. Please send original clippings or photocopies and give name and date of publication. Submissions cannot be acknowledged or returned.

Punishing the Victim or the Rapist?



New Mexico state legislator Cathrynn Brown introduced a bill in January that appeared to make it a felony for victims of rape or incest to get an abortion. The bill called it "tampering with evidence." After an outcry, Brown amended her bill the following day and said she meant it to apply only to rapists coercing their victims to have an abortion.

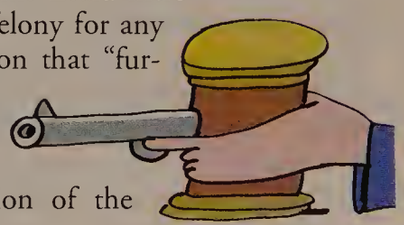
Bad Holocaust Analogy #937,521

Idaho state senator Sheryl Nuxoll opposes a state health care exchange, as required by the Affordable Care Act, and she compared insurance companies that are going along with it to "the Jews boarding the trains to concentration camps. . . . Several years from now, the federal government will want nothing to do with private insurance companies. The feds will have a national system of health insurance and they will pull the trigger on the insurance companies."

U.S. Special Forces Almost Invaded Yale

An associate professor of psychology at the Yale School of Medicine had applied for a federal grant to bring U.S. Special Forces to campus. Charles A. Morgan III wanted to teach interrogation techniques to the Green Berets. He planned on having them practice on "someone they can't necessarily identify with," he told *Yale Herald*. He suggested he'd pay New Haven immigrants from Colombia, Ecuador, Morocco, and Nepal to participate. After many Yale students and alums complained, both the university and the Pentagon begged off.

A Bill to Outlaw Bills on Gun Control



Missouri state representative Mike Leara introduced legislation to make it a felony for any lawmaker to introduce legislation that "further restricts the right of an individual to bear arms, as set forth under the Second Amendment of the Constitution of the United States."

STUART GOLDENBERG

Letters to the Editor

Oliver Stone and the A-Bomb

Whenever the question of dropping the A-bomb on Japan (An Interview with Oliver Stone, February issue) came up, my dad would always say, "Anyone against dropping the bomb wasn't on the deck of a ship off the coast of Japan in August 1945."

My father was at Iwo Jima, where the Japanese fought almost to the last man, and Okinawa, where not only did almost every enemy soldier die but they murdered thousands of civilians before the final attacks on U.S. troops.

One million allied casualties were expected in the invasion of Japan. Plus the prospect of thousands of civilians being forced by militaristic fanatics to charge invading American troops with sticks, forcing American troops to shoot down men, women, and children.

Truman the "equivalent to George W. Bush"?

The President Truman who integrated the U.S. military?

The last Democratic President who actually supported the labor movement?

The President who pushed for national health insurance and a full employment economy?

Please, Mr. Stone, get in touch with reality!

William F. Johnston
Tacoma, Washington

Oliver Stone and his co-author, Peter Kuznick, respond:

Memory serves an important purpose, but it is not the same as history. Your father, much like all the brave men and women who served in the Pacific in World War II, was told that the atomic bombings on August 6 and 9, 1945, prevented an invasion of Japan and probably saved his life. He had no reason to doubt that this was true.

History, however, is more complicated. It requires evidence, not hearsay.

As we show in *The Untold History of the United States*, our book and documentary film series, the Soviet invasion of Japan, not the atomic bombings, was the decisive factor in forcing Japan's surrender. The United States had already firebombed 100 Japanese cities since March, burning many to the ground.

The Soviet invasion at midnight on August 8 was something fundamentally different that, U.S. officials knew, Japanese leaders dreaded. It proved the bankruptcy of Japan's diplomatic and its military strategies. It dashed Japanese leaders' hopes that the USSR would help them get better surrender terms and made it impossible for Japan to hold on long enough to deliver a decisive blow to U.S. forces in an invasion that was not set to begin until November.

Truman knew of Japan's desperation to end the war. He referred to an intercepted July 18 cable as the "telegram from the Jap emperor asking for peace."

U.S. intelligence had been saying for months that the Soviet invasion would deliver the crippling blow that would spell Japan's doom. Truman wrote in his Potsdam diary on July 17: Stalin will "be in the Jap War on August 15. Fini Japs when that comes about."

No wonder six of America's seven five-star admirals and generals who earned their fifth star in World War II are on record as saying the bombs were militarily unnecessary, morally reprehensible, or both.

We don't equate Harry Truman with George W. Bush, except in their subterranean approval ratings at the close of their presidencies.

Truman's domestic policies were certainly far more progressive than Bush's. Their blunders and crimes were of a fundamentally different sort.

Bush began two disastrous wars. Truman bears primary responsibility for starting the Cold War. But perhaps even more egregious, in inaugurating the nuclear age in the way he did, in the way the letter writer mistakenly thinks saved his father's life, Truman began a process that he acknowledged several times could eventually end all life on the planet.

The world has fortunately survived both Truman and Bush.

But, as we make clear throughout our project, only learning from the past and avoiding similar errors and transgressions in the future can ultimately guarantee the continued survival of our species and all others.

And that is the sad reality that we need to get in touch with.

Two Sides to Estate Tax

I am a subscriber and a great fan of *The Progressive*, but I take exception to the Editor's Note in the February issue ("Obama, the Hang-Glider," by Matthew Rothschild), which states that "the super rich got a huge break on the estate tax." I assure you that I am not "super rich," but some would say that I benefit from the exclusion. There are two sides to this issue.

I am a retired construction manager. I started working when I was fourteen years old. I put myself through college and inherited zero when my parents died.

By living well below my means for forty-five years and investing conservatively, I was able to accumulate substantial assets. These assets have been taxed as ordinary income (no tax avoidance for me).

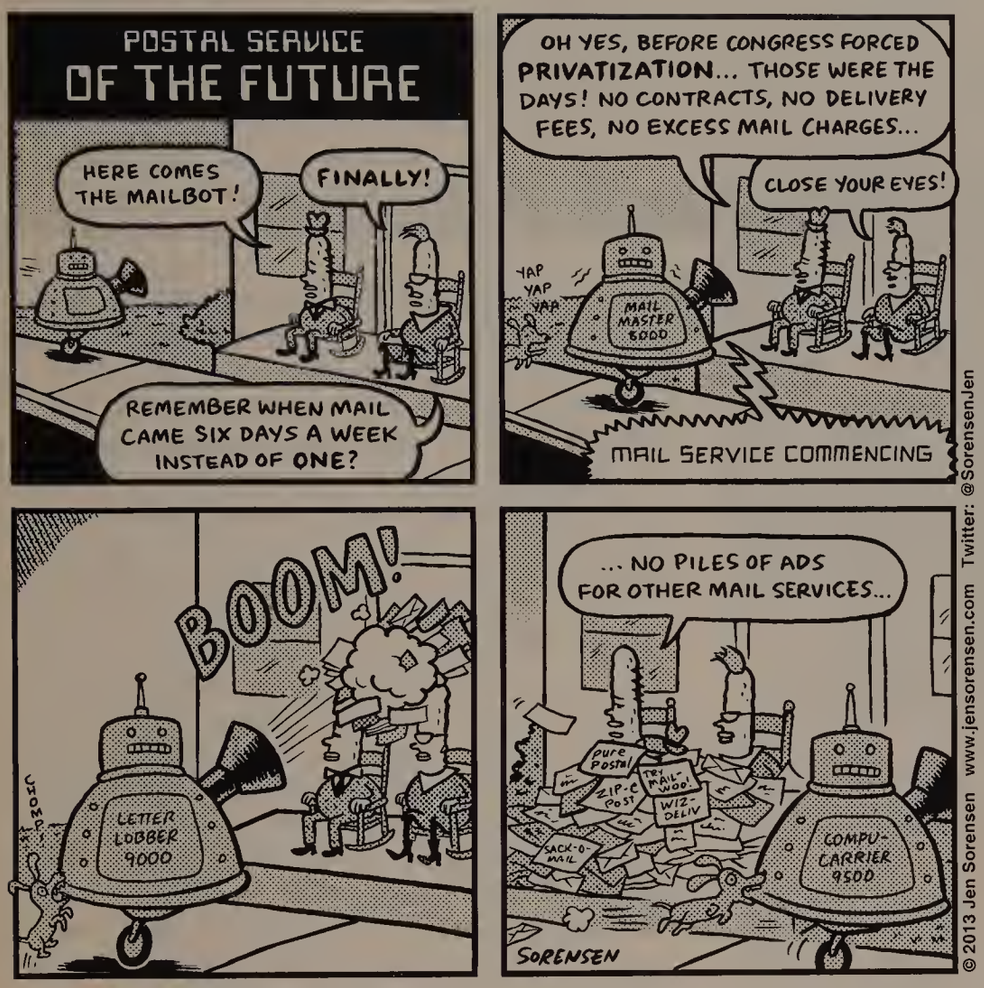
To subject these assets to an estate tax upon my death amounts to double taxation, which is unfair, undemocratic, and should not be tolerated.

Bob Bishop
Park Ridge, Illinois

The Editor responds:

I noted that the tax deal President

SLOWPOKE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Obama signed off on lets the super rich "give their heirs $5 million tax free" instead of the $1 million that would have happened had the Bush tax been repealed. Actually, I was wrong: Now the super rich get to give their heirs $5,250,000 tax free. If you're in that bracket, I'd say you qualify as super-rich, though you're probably not in Bill Gates's league.

The "double taxation" argument is also specious—and a favorite of the rightwing. Most taxes are "double taxes." My income is taxed, and then when I go to the store, it's taxed again. So the sales tax is a double tax. The property tax is a double tax.

The question shouldn't be about "double taxation," but about which tax is the fairest. A progressive income tax is fair because it recognizes that those at higher levels can pay a higher percentage in taxes without suffering excruciating pain. A progressive estate tax is fair. Raising much-needed funds by way of the estate tax exacts the least pain (in fact, no one feels any pain, and heirs still get a windfall), and it's an attempt—feeble as it is—to avoid a landed aristocracy in this country and to offer some semblance of equality of opportunity.

While I admire the hard work you performed and the prudent investments that you made, Bob, I think you're way off on the estate tax. But I'm glad you like the magazine. We don't require or desire 100 percent assent on every issue. That would be the height of tedium.

Matthew Rothschild

The Progressive

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Jack Lew's Austerity Bomb

As Jack Lew, President Obama's choice for Treasury Secretary, sailed through his confirmation hearings, Americans got ready to duck and cover for the blast from the austerity bomb that went off on March 1.

The Obama Administration was supposed to be on our side in holding off the massive, automatic, senseless "sequester" cuts that hit at the beginning of March.

Instead, a combination of lousy negotiating with Republicans in Congress and a pro-Wall Street bias that makes deficits an obsession even in this stagnant economy left ordinary citizens unprotected.

The Democrats, and the Obama Administration in particular, have simply not done enough to defend Americans from the pain of austerity and the unnecessary economic damage the sequester cuts are bound to do to our country.

Lew is a prime example.

The whole sequester idea was his brainchild, together with White House Congressional relations chief Rob Nabors, according to *The Washington Post*'s Bob Woodward.

In his latest book, Woodward describes then-White House budget director Lew presenting the plan for the automatic cuts to Harry Reid in 2011. Reid, according to the book, bent over and put his head between his knees like he was going to be sick.

The idea, Lew explained, was that Democrats would win the game of chicken. The $85 billion in across-the-board spending cuts would be so unacceptable to Republicans and Democrats alike that it would never come to pass.

It didn't work out that way.

While Obama seemed to win the first round of those negotiations when he got the Republicans to agree on tax hikes for the very rich, it was still a lopsided agreement that fundamentally favors Republican ideology, as Senator Tom Harkin pointed out.

For starters, the deal permanently codifies the Bush-era tax breaks for people who make up to $400,000, or $450,000 for couples. Those tax cuts had been temporary until now.

Relief for people of more modest means, on the other hand, is still tenuous, Harkin noted. "It should be the other way around."

Rhetorically, we have now moved the bar on the "middle class" from the top 2 percent who make $250,000 to the top 1 percent, who make $400,000.

More fundamentally, the very terms of the debate—which ignored the importance of getting people back to work, even as unemployment remains above 7 percent, and left aside the critical role of investment in infrastructure and education in getting the economy back on track—favored the Republicans' model of austerity for the poor and middle class, and protection for the wealthy.

Like the "panic button" votes on the TARP and other bailouts, Harkin argued, the rush to pass a deal, coupled with the threat that the whole economy would unravel if it wasn't passed in a hurry, led to a flawed agreement.

Worst of all, Wall Streeters won the most basic elements of the debate—just by setting up the false emergency and playing the game of chicken devised by Jack Lew.

And guess who was left with his head between his knees again at the end of that first round of negotiations? Harry Reid.

A lengthy piece in the *National Journal* reports that Reid was holding out for a better result, knowing that the Republicans were under more pressure, since the public blamed them for obstructing a reasonable outcome.

Reid was prepared to stick to Obama's original demand that the Bush-era tax cuts for people making more than $250,000 expire. Mitch McConnell, upset at Reid's stubbornness, turned to Joe Biden, and the "middle class" was redefined to include people who make $400,000.

Possibly worst of all, Harkin points out, in going soft in the negotiations, the Democrats ultimately "gave away all our bargaining chips."

Once the deal on taxes was done, he warned, the

"The idiocy of the sequester . . . is only the latest episode. . . . A misguided elite consensus has led us into an economic quagmire, and it's time for us to get out."

—Paul Krugman

Republicans could insist that the only issue in Round Two was spending, which is what they did.

The Obama Administration set us up for this bad outcome—especially Jack Lew.

During his confirmation hearings, Senator Charles Grassley, Republican of Iowa, asked about the morality of Lew's $940,000 bonus in 2008, the day before Citigroup got a massive taxpayer-funded bailout to prevent it from going bust.

That bailout, you might remember, was a hurry-up job designed to deal with the source of our current economic woes—bad bets on mortgages by banks like Citigroup.

Lew said his compensation was "consistent with other people."

Other people who are part of the same elite Wall Street club, that is.

And he made no apologies for the $45 billion bailout during his tenure as chief operating officer at Citigroup. Nor for the fact that, as Bernie Sanders said, financial institutions made more than $143 billion in profits in 2012—their most profitable year on record except for 2006, just before the economic meltdown.

Lew and other members of the Wall Street club have made deficit reduction during the weak economy a priority, and put cuts to those who can least afford it on the table.

As Sanders pointed out in a floor speech opposing Lew's appointment, "The next Treasury Secretary will be the lead negotiator for the President on how to reduce the deficit." Sanders went on: "Here is the issue: Do we balance the budget by cutting Social Security, Medicare, Medicaid, education, nutrition, and programs that middle income and working families depend upon?"

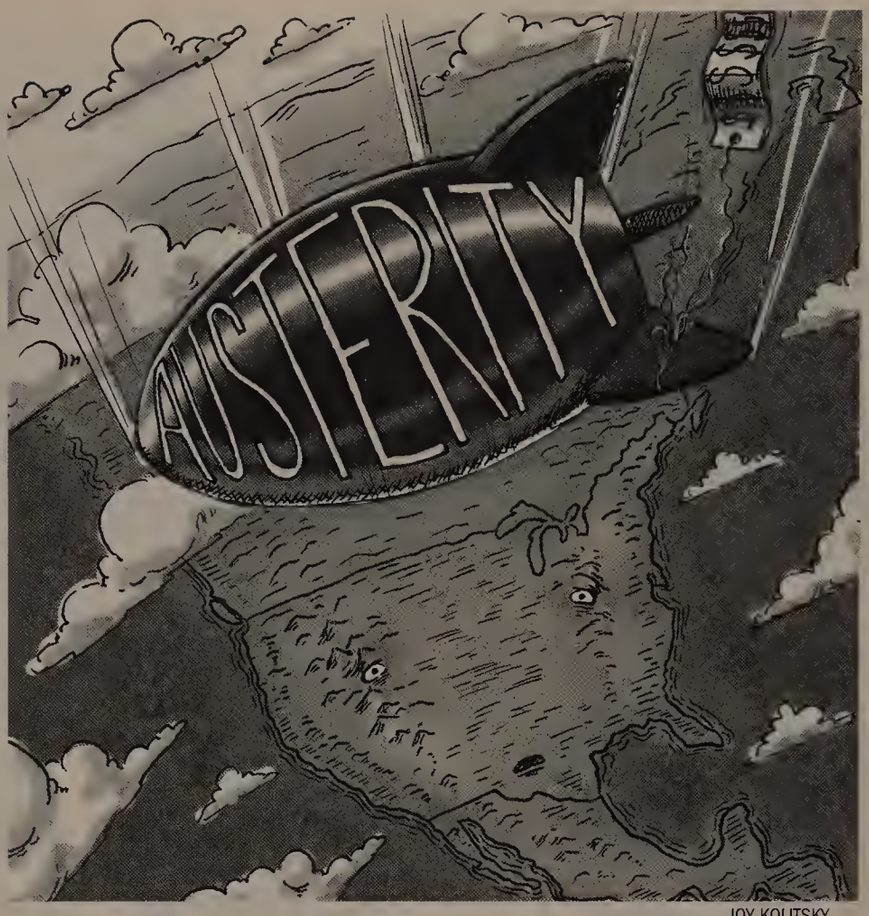
If so, Sanders said, "it will mean huge suffering for tens and tens of millions of families who are already hurting."

Lew rejects the idea that the financial crisis was caused by deregulation, testifying that the Glass-Steagall Act was "anachronistic."

Three of the four largest financial institutions today are all bigger than they were when they were bailed out in 2008 because they were "too big to fail."

But "too big to fail" is not a concern, Lew said in his confirmation hearings. What is a concern, according to Lew, the Obama Administration, and Republicans and Democrats alike in Congress, is the deficit—and the growth of "entitlements" like Medicare, Medicaid, and Social Security.

Never mind that as former Labor Secretary Robert Reich points out, federal deficits are dropping as a percent of the total economy. In 2009, the deficit was 10.1 percent of gross domestic product. In the 2012 fiscal year, it was down to 7 percent.



JOY KOLITSKY

The deficit ballooned in 2009 because of the Great Recession. Stimulus spending, increasing employment, and rising tax revenue caused it to shrink. Drastic cuts will have the opposite effect.

Turns out the same people who brought us the financial crisis are the people who are heavily engaged in lobbying for austerity for the poor and middle class, and tax cuts for the very rich and corporations.

Fix the Debt, promoted by Wall Street billionaire Pete Peterson, is the prime lobby group behind this effort.

The Center for Media and Democracy released a massive report in late February on Fix the Debt and the conflicts of interest of its members. These include many Democrats and Obama Administration friends like Ed Rendell, the former governor of Pennsylvania; Erskine Bowles, the former Clinton Administration official who co-chaired the Bowles/Simpson commission; and other Wall Streeters.

If we are going to defuse the austerity bomb, ordinary citizens need to be loud enough to be heard over the voices of the powerful Wall Street lobby.◆

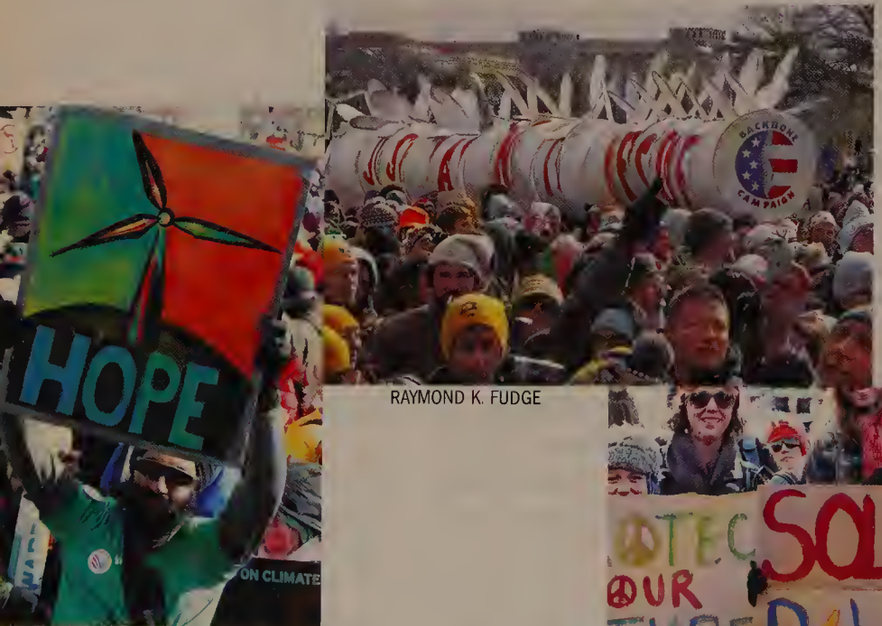
—Ruth Conniff

"I wish President Obama and the Democrats would explain to the nation that the federal budget deficit isn't the nation's major economic problem and deficit reduction shouldn't be our major goal. Our problem is lack of good jobs and sufficient growth, and our goal must be to revive both."

—Robert Reich

SHADIA FAYNE WOODPROJECT SURVIVAL MEDIA/SIERRA CLUB/350.ORG

Obama, Are You Listening?



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RAYMOND K. FUDGE

Washington, DC

On Sunday, February 17, tens of thousands of people rallied to protest against global warming. They demanded that President Obama block the Keystone XL Pipeline and take other principled action to wean the country off of fossil fuels. The rally was sponsored by 350.org, the Sierra Club, and the Hip-Hop Caucus.

350.ORG

MILAN ILNYCKYJ (SINDARK.COM)

NEWSCOM/UPI/KEVIN DIETSCH

Brennan Drones On

NEWSCOM/GETTY IMAGES/AFP/JEWEL SAMAD

© CODEPINK

Washington, DC
On February 7, CodePink activists protested the confirmation hearings of Obama's choice to head the CIA, John Brennan, who directed drone attacks in Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Yemen.

For more information, go to codepink4peace.org.

© JIM WEST/WWW.JIMWESTPHOTO.COM

Support Auto Parts Workers

Warren, MI
On February 21, union supporters gathered outside a plant that belongs to one of the nation's largest auto supplier, the Flex-N-Gate Corp, to demand safety in the workplace, living wages, and an end to the intimidation of workers who want to form a union.

For more information, go to justiceatflexngate.org.

Gun Control Now!

© MARILYN HUMPHRIES PHOTOS

Boston, MA

On February 22, protesters demanded universal background checks and other sensible gun control measures. The Boston demonstration was part of the National Day of Action to reduce gun violence and was put on by Organizing for Action, Stop Handgun Violence, and Mothers for Justice and Equality.

Exposing the Debt Mongers

Washington, DC

Hundreds of protesters demonstrated outside the offices of Fix the Debt, a corporate group that hypes the threat of the debt and the deficit. The event was put on by Our DC, a grassroots group dedicated to fighting for low income and working class residents of the nation's capital.

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For more information, contact Our DC at thisisourdc.org.

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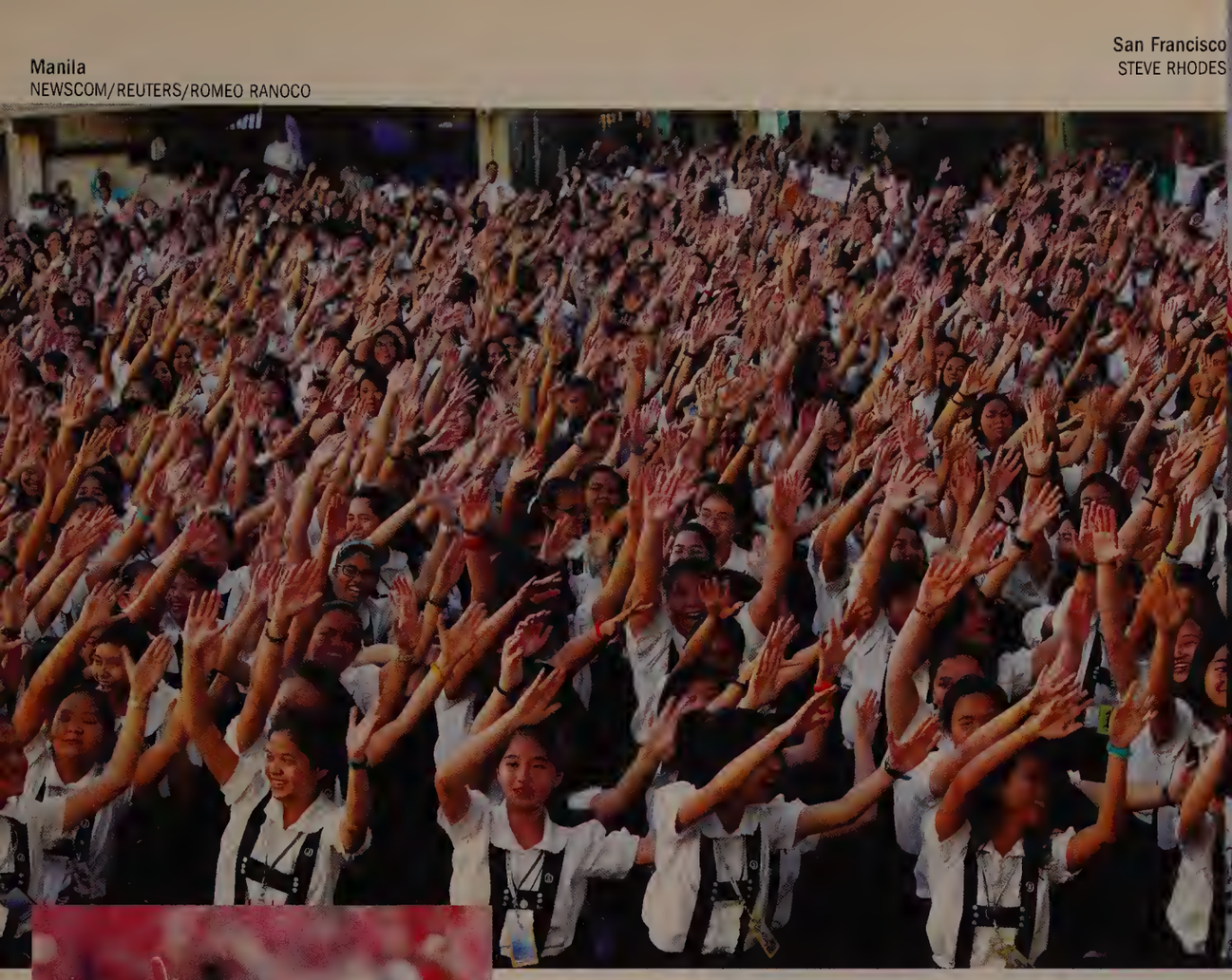

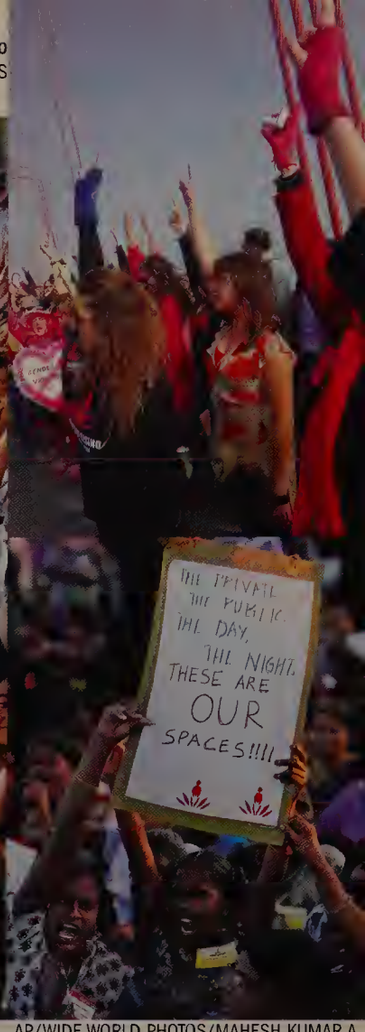

AP/WIDE WORLD PHOTOS/MAHESH KUMAR A.
Hyderabad, India

No More Violence Against Women

On February 14, women rallied in large numbers in many countries around the world to protest against the epidemic of violence against girls and women. The event, "One Billion Rising," was the brainchild of Eve Ensler and featured mass dancing. Organizers said the event made "violence against women impossible to ignore and never to be marginalized again."

For more information, go to onebillionrising.org.

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By Jason Mark
Illustration by Alex Nabaum

Global Warming:
Holding Obama's Feet to the Fire

FABIENNE ANTOINE CAME ALL the way from Atlanta to Washington, D.C., to hold President Obama to his word.

The twenty-one-year-old political science major at Spelman College says she was psyched when, during his second Inaugural Address, the President made a bold moral claim for taking action to address global warming, telling the nation, "We will respond to the threat of climate change, knowing that the failure to do so would betray our children and future generations." But she worries that political pressures will temper the President's passion. So she and friends formed a group called Sustainable Spelman and organized some fifty young women to charter a bus and drive nine hours through the night to join the Forward on Climate rally in the capital.

"This rally is to make sure he carries out what he said, that he does what he promised," Antoine, who is also president of Spelman's Young Democrats club, told me. "There needs to be more accountability for what these oil companies are doing, and more policies that support clean energy."

Antoine's guarded optimism was the prevailing mood among the estimated 35,000 people who gathered on the National Mall on the Sunday of Presidents Day weekend for what organizers said was the largest U.S. climate demonstration to date. (Similar

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Jason Mark is editor of the environmental quarterly Earth Island Journal (www.earthislandjournal.org) and a co-manager of San Francisco's Alemany Farm (www.alemanyfarm.org).

protests occurred in at least eighteen cities around the country the same day.) Kids in strollers and elderly folks in wheelchairs endured biting, below-freezing winds and a mud-clogged field at the base of the Washington Monument to call on Obama to take strong action to slash U.S. greenhouse gas emissions and put the United States on the path to a renewable energy future.

"There is no Planet B" was among the most popular hand-lettered placards as the crowd marched around the White House, at times erupting in chants of, "Hey, Obama—we don't want no climate drama!" One family marched with an Earth flag stamped with the words "Too Big to Fail" above the planet. "Texas Baptists for Clean Energy," read a banner carried by a group of eight women who had traveled to the demonstration from Nacogdoches.

The Sierra Club, 350.org, and the Hip-Hop Caucus organized the rally to put a face on the two-thirds of Americans who, according to recent polls, say they want government action to address climate change. The purpose was to demonstrate to the President that he has the political backing to challenge the powerful fossil fuel industry.

Environmentalists say that what Obama chooses to do on climate change will, more than anything else, define his Presidential legacy. While recognizing the importance of other priorities like gun control, immigration reform, and health care, they say that fifty years from now Obama will be remembered for his action—or, they fear, his inaction—on global warming.

"If he doesn't do anything, then for the rest of the century all the rest of his accomplishments will be wiped out by floods and storms," former White House green jobs adviser Van Jones said to me before the demonstration began. "There won't be a twenty-second century to judge him."

Obama mostly disappointed greens during his first four years in office.

Some progress was made, to be sure: The 2009 stimulus bill included about $90 billion for various clean energy and green jobs programs, and last year the President put in place rules that will nearly double the fuel efficiency of cars and trucks by 2025.

But the White House put little to no political muscle into the 2010 effort to get a comprehensive climate bill through Congress. The President's leadership during the BP oil spill was lackluster, and he hesitated to exercise EPA authority to rein in emissions. And Obama's call for an "all-of-the-above" energy strategy that included mythical "clean coal" made many greens distrustful. "A deficiency of ambition," is how Sierra Club executive director Michael Brune described the President's first term.

"If Obama doesn't do anything, there won't be a twenty-second century to judge him," says Van Jones.

But since his reelection, a newly emboldened Obama appears to have made a pivot on global warming. His strong words at the inauguration ("We will preserve our planet, commanded to our care by God") and during his State of the Union address ("If Congress won't act soon to protect future generations, I will") have sparked new optimism among environmentalists.

Now comes the hard part: compelling the President to translate his rhetoric into real policy achievements.

"Mr. President, we have heard what you said on climate," Brune thundered to the crowd at the Forward on Climate rally. "We have loved what you said on climate. But, Mr. President, what will you *do* on climate?"

If we have to wait on Congress to tackle global warming, we're cooked.

House Republicans, especially, are dominated by the willfully ignorant who continue to deny climate science and by the shills who have been bought off by the carbon barons. All eyes, then, are on the President.

"The polluting industries have Congress pretty much locked up," Senator Sheldon Whitehouse, a Rhode Island Democrat who has been a leader on environmental and climate issues, said to me before the rally. The President "has been largely AWOL on this issue in his first term, especially as a public voice. That has changed—he has found his voice. He owns the keys to the kingdom on climate, and I hope he uses them to unlock executive and regulatory powers."

In the absence of Congressional action, what could Obama do unilaterally to tackle climate change? Quite a number of things, it turns out.

The first major test for the President will come later this spring, when he has to make a decision on whether to grant a cross-border permit for the

Keystone XL pipeline. The pipeline, which would transport especially carbon-intensive tar sands oil from Canada to the Gulf of Mexico, became a red-hot political issue in August 2011, when more than 1,200 people were arrested at the White House demanding the President reject the proposal. The President has since greenlighted the southern section of the pipeline, a move that has sparked civil disobedience actions along the construction route. The State Department still has to rule on whether the cross-border section is in the national interest. As Van Jones told the rally crowd, if Obama approves the pipeline, "the first thing it will run over will be the credibility of the President of the United States."

The pipeline is, according to author-activist Bill McKibben, "a fuse to the largest carbon bomb on the planet." Pipeline construction would signal that the United States has no intention of breaking its oil addiction. A hand-made sign at the Forward on Climate rally made the point clearly: "Keystone —> Tombstone."

Environmentalists are also looking to the President to put in place new emissions rules for existing power plants. In 2007, the Supreme Court ruled that carbon dioxide could be regulated by the EPA under the Clean Air Act, meaning that the President already has all the authority he needs to tackle the number one driver of climate change. Last year, the Administration proposed more stringent CO_2 standards for new power plants, rules that should be finalized soon. Now greens are pushing the White House to put in place stricter rules for existing plants, many of which still burn coal. A detailed plan by the Natural Resources Defense Council shows how, using existing Clean Air Act Authority, the EPA could reduce power plant emissions by 26 percent by 2020. Given that electricity generation accounts for 40 percent of U.S. greenhouse gas emissions, that would be a major step forward.

Beyond denying the Keystone XL permit and establishing new regulations for power plants, there are a slew of smaller things the Obama Administration could do on the climate.

—The Department of Energy could write new standards for buildings' energy efficiency.

—The Department of the Interior could approve more large-scale wind and solar installations on public lands.

—The State Department, now headed by climate champion John Kerry, could initiate bilateral greenhouse gas reductions talks with China.

—The White House could direct the Army Corp of Engineers to consider the global warming impacts of proposed coal and liquefied natural gas export facilities.

—Phasing out the hydrofluorocarbons used in air conditioning systems would also help, as would mandating that natural gas drillers do more to capture the leakage of methane, which is at least twenty times more heat-trapping than CO_2.

Altogether, these steps could reduce total U.S. emissions by 17 percent, according to a report from the World Resources Institute.

"The President has the tools and the authority to make emission reductions," the institute's senior associate Nicholas Bianco told me. "It will be interesting to see if he takes advantage of those. The science is clear: The time for taking action is running short."

"The science is clear: The time for taking action is running short."

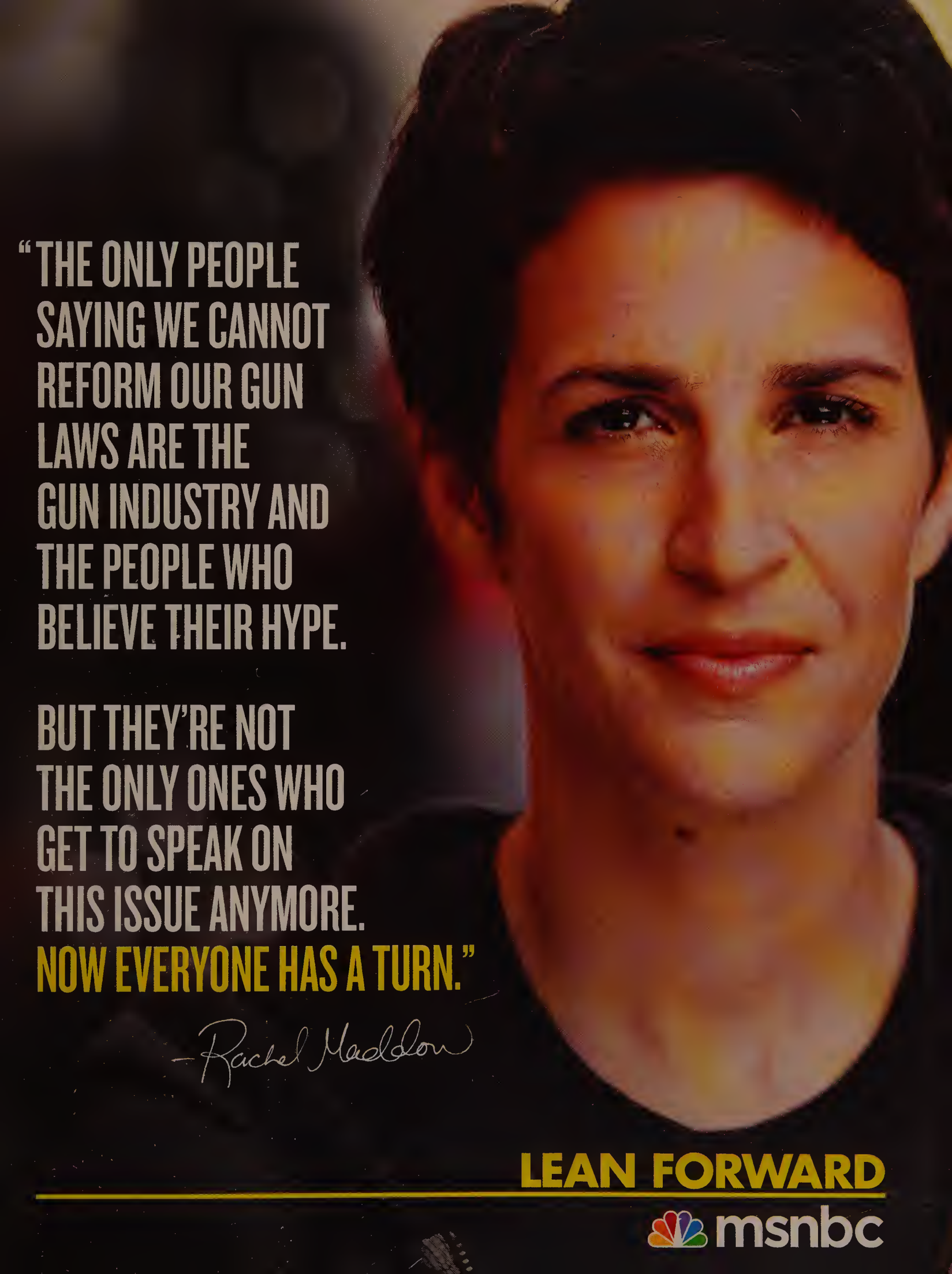
If Obama were to cross off of his to-do list all of the items above, it would represent an important step forward on climate action—and yet, environmentalists say, it would still be insufficient.

What's desperately needed is for the President to use the force of his personality and the prestige of his office to elevate climate to a national cause. The President hasn't yet made a single speech focused on the climate threat, and that in itself marks a failure of leadership. All too aware that climate disruptions are accelerating, greens are looking to the President to demonstrate the same enthusiasm that he has shown for gun control since the tragedy at Sandy Hook Elementary.

"I think we're witnessing the death of nature, and that makes me so sad," a retired attorney from Manhattan, Ann Lewis Seltzer, told me at the Forward on Climate rally. A lifelong cross-country skier who has noticed how the winters are warming, she was carrying a homemade sign reading, "Save Our Seasons."

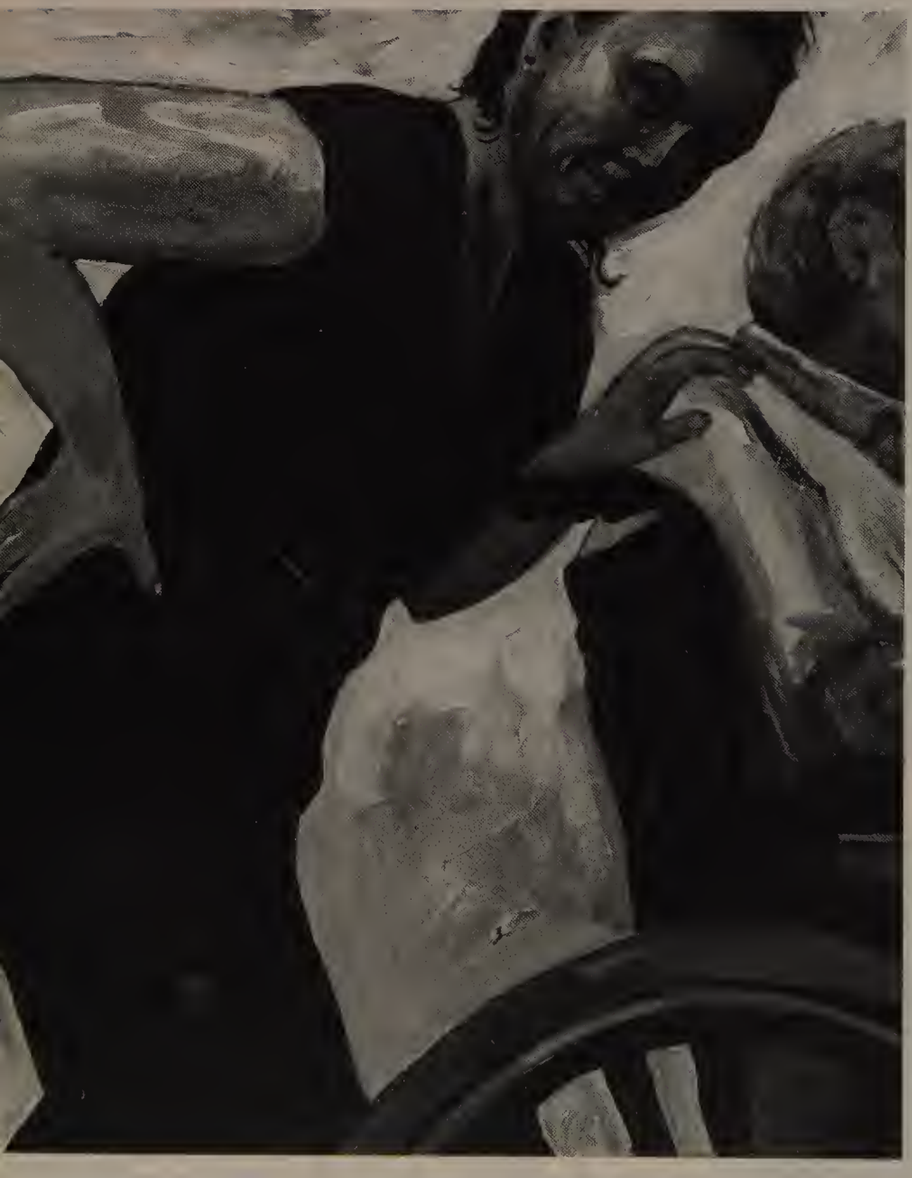
"I love President Obama," she said. "I hope he will be brave about what he can do without Congress."

It's not her hope alone. It's the hope of the planet. ◆


"THE ONLY PEOPLE SAYING WE CANNOT REFORM OUR GUN LAWS ARE THE GUN INDUSTRY AND THE PEOPLE WHO BELIEVE THEIR HYPE.
BUT THEY'RE NOT THE ONLY ONES WHO GET TO SPEAK ON THIS ISSUE ANYMORE.
NOW EVERYONE HAS A TURN."
-Rachel Maddow
LEAN FORWARD
msnbc

By Hank Kalet
Illustration by Kelly Mudge

Hope for Home-Care Workers



SHELLY SAYS SHE HAS IT comparatively easy. She works for a single client, a quadriplegic whose family remains involved with her care, and she puts in forty hours a week—something she says is a rarity for people in the rural Ohio region in which she lives and works.

While the client's mother does a lot of the cooking, and family members help with other tasks, Shelly is the primary care provider for the disabled woman. Shelly feeds her, brushes her teeth, washes her face, and combs her hair. She helps her go to the toilet, gets her dressed, and eases her into and out of her wheelchair.

"Once we're settled in, I sit and wait for her to ask me to do something," says Shelly, who asks that her last name not be used. "I give her water, coffee. Because she can't rub her eyes or scratch her nose, that is an important part of my job. I'm her handmaiden."

Shelly says she loves the job—"you have to or you shouldn't be doing it"—but "it's a difficult way to make a living, when you aren't compensated what you should be."

"Most home-care givers feel a responsibility for the people they care for," she says. "If they get a call, they

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Hank Kalet is a poet and journalist in central New Jersey. He covers economic issues for NJ Spotlight and teaches newswriting at Rutgers and at Middlesex County College.

will drop anything and go."

She adds: "Because this is a job done by mostly minority women, we are not respected for the work we do and for the skills we have."

A 2011 report from the Paraprofessional Healthcare Institute found that about 90 percent of home-care workers were women and about half were minorities. African Americans make up 35 percent of home-health aides and 22 percent of personal-care assistants; Latinos make up 8 percent of home-health aides and 18 percent of personal-care assistants.

Shelly works six hours a day Monday through Wednesday and then twenty-two hours on the weekend. For that, she earns $527 a week—and that is a lot, compared to others working in the home-care field.

Shelly is one of about 1.9 million home-health aides and personal-care assistants in the United States. They earn a median wage of $9.70 an hour ($20,170 per year), and the vast majority serve multiple clients. Most are not eligible for overtime, and many find themselves working the equivalent of sixteen-hour days, when time spent doing paperwork or driving from client to client is factored in.

That's why home-care workers and their advocates have been fighting to unionize in a number of states, while also putting pressure on the Obama Administration to finally reverse an exemption to federal law that keeps many home-care aides from earning minimum wage or overtime pay.

"This work is hard," says Milly Silva, executive vice president for New Jersey for 1199 SEIU, United Healthcare Workers East. "The question is how to make sure that the person living at home is getting the care they need and that the person providing the care is getting the support needed."

Tracy Dudzinski, who lives in Princeton, Wisconsin, but works in Wautoma twenty-plus miles away, says her day regularly runs twelve hours or more.

"I get up and leave home at 6:00 to get to my first client by 6:30, and I help him shower and get him breakfast so he can get on the bus to go to work," she says. "That's 8:00 a.m., and then by 8:15 I'm on to my second one."

"A bad day," she adds, could mean driving thirty-five miles between clients and spending nearly as much time behind the wheel as helping patients.

"I could be with one lady, doing her laundry and cleaning for her for two hours, and then I'm in the car again going to help someone take a bath and eat lunch, and then I'm in the car again going to help someone take a bath, and then in the car again to help someone eat supper, and then help someone take a shower and get in bed for the night," she says. "Some days, there is sixteen hours of travel and work, and I'm lucky if get a full eight hours pay."

"Because this is a job done by mostly minority women, we are not respected for the work we do."

The number of home-care jobs is expected to grow more quickly than any other profession by 2020, according to the U.S. Department of Labor. The profession—which includes home-health aides, personal-care aides, and direct-support professionals—is expected to grow by 70 percent over the next eight years.

Jessica Brill Ortiz, national advocacy coordinator for the Direct Care Alliance, says the fate of the industry will have a huge impact on the American economy. With about one in every fifteen new jobs expected to be created in home-health care, making sure that the people who attend to the elderly and infirm earn enough to survive is really a national economic issue.

"This could be great news for the economy, if it meant we were growing the middle class," she says. "But given the low wages they receive, we are not growing the middle class. We are growing the working poor."

Studies have shown that half of the home-care workforce is on public assistance and about 40 percent lacks health insurance. PHI PolicyWorks, based in New York, says that thirty-six states reported hourly wages for home-care workers that fell below 200 percent of the federal poverty line in 2009.

"These very low wages are a significant obstacle to meeting the country's rapidly growing demand for personal assistance services," Dorie Seavey, director of policy research for the organization, said in 2010 when the report was released. "They also jeopardize the economic security of hundreds of thousands of caregivers who make it possible for others to live independently."

A number of policy changes could help elevate home-care wages, advocates say, including rules that would ensure that Medicaid and Medicare make higher reimbursements for home care, an increase in federal and state subsidies, and a general shift in attitude.

The first target, however, is the federal rule that exempts home-care workers from overtime and minimum wage requirements.

The exemption dates back to 1974, when Congress updated the Fair Labor Standards Act to protect domestic service workers, or "employees performing services of a household nature," but excluded "casual babysitters and companions

for the aged and infirm," according to the U.S. Department of Labor.

Labor rights groups have criticized the exemption for years, saying it is too broad and was never meant to exclude workers performing the kinds of tasks done by personal-care assistants and home-health aides.

"If you take a look at the legislative history behind the law, it was meant to cover workers who come over and spend time with your grandmother," says Sarah Leberstein, a staff attorney for the National Employment Law Project. "But the courts have defined it to include two million workers—even workers using medical skills, lifting of patients, and doing wound care."

Ortiz of the Direct Care Alliance agrees.

"The term was meant for people who came in a couple of times a week and just sat with clients," she says. "Over the years, the role of the home-care worker has changed dramatically, and the exemption is very different than what it was meant to be."

The Direct Care Alliance and other groups thought they had a victory in December 2011, when President Obama and the Labor Department unveiled a new rule that, if approved, would end the exemption for home-care workers. Obama announced the proposed rule at a White House press event, surrounded by more than a dozen home-care workers. He called the exemption "just wrong" and inexcusable.

"I can tell you firsthand that these men and women, they work their tails off, and they don't complain," he said. Obama spent a day with a home-care worker in 2007, during the early stages of his first Presidential campaign. "They deserve to be treated fairly. They deserve to be paid fairly for a service that many older Americans couldn't live without. And companies who do pay fair wages to these women shouldn't be put at a disadvantage."

But more than a year later, the new rules still have not been approved, despite overwhelming support during the comment period. Advocates say the change was supported by between two-thirds and more than three-quarters of those who responded.

Dudzinski, who is chair of the Direct Care Alliance's board of directors, was standing behind the President when he announced the rule change.

"We're still waiting on these," she says. "And while it wouldn't affect us in Wisconsin—state law already guarantees those rights—I still take part in this fight because it is a matter of respect for what we do."

Dudzinski and five other caregivers and clients sent a letter to the White House in December asking the President to put the new rules into place.

"Home care remains one of our nation's fastest-growing but lowest-paid occupations," the letter said. "Wages have long stagnated and since December [2011], have even declined in some states, forcing more workers and their families who live in poverty to rely on public assistance. Workers continue to provide invaluable care for seniors and people with disabilities without fair pay or the dignity that comes from having their work be valued and respected."

Home-care agencies, the letter said, benefit from the exemption in increased profits, while the low wages lead to a churning of the workforce that is not good for patient care. Turnover rates for workers have been estimated at more than 60 percent by some industry observers.

The industry, however, has been fighting the rule change since it was first proposed. The major players are spending money lobbying the Administration and on Capitol Hill to keep the changes from going into effect, *USA Today* reported last year. And they are doing it at a time when the home-care industry is raking in profits.

"When our members wake up, they are going to take care of someone else's family member," Silva of 1199 SEIU says. "For them to be effective and do that well, they have to know that when they come home at night they can be confident that they can take care of themselves and their families."

Insurance is a significant issue, Shelly in Ohio says. Without insurance, she feels she cannot get sick, and she also has to put off health care visits that most of us take for granted.

"I have a tooth that is rotting out of my head, it is so bad, but I have to make sure I take care of my taxes before I can go to the dentist," she says. She is considered a private contractor, she says, so she does not have taxes deducted by an employer and has to make sure she sets aside enough from her pay weekly to cover them. Plus, she does not qualify for unemployment insurance.

Dudzinski has gone to work when she was sick because she could not afford to miss work. When you don't work, she said, you don't get paid.

"There are times I've gone in and wore a mask," she says. In those instances, "you wash your hands more than you would normally and try not to breathe on the clients."

Dudzinski says that a major concern is injuries. Many of the health aides she knows have gotten hurt on the job, herself included.

"It is a hard job," she says. "It is more dangerous, according to OSHA, than being a truck driver. You're lifting people who are bigger than you. Sometimes, you don't have the right equipment or you are tripping over rugs and dogs and cats."

That puts a lot of stress on home-care workers, she says, especially because most are conscientious and like what they do.

Shelly agrees. She likes her job, but thinks the conditions must change.

"It is not a bad job, but it is the whole pay thing," she says. "I am, literally, two paychecks away from being on the street. And that is no way to live." ◆

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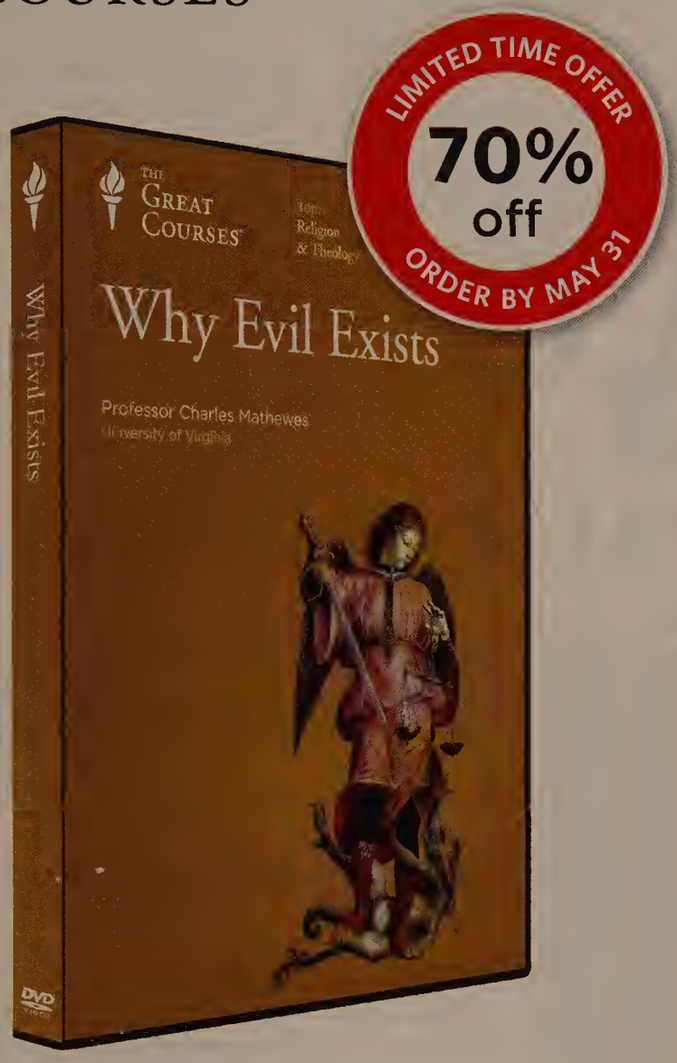

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By Josh Healey
Illustration by Matthew Leake

NAFTA Corn Fuels Immigration

It was my first time in Mexico, and something felt off. I was sitting outside the faded colonial church in Teotitlan del Valle, a village in the beautiful, proudly indigenous state of Oaxaca in southern Mexico. I surveyed the scene, trying to decipher the source of my uneasiness. In the town square facing the church, people were going about their day: haggling over the price of beans, weaving rugs, enjoying a taste of the region's famous black *mole* sauce.

And then it hit me: They were all women. OK, a few girls and *abuelitas* were running around, but the only man besides me was the guy inside the church hanging on a cross.

"Where are all the men?" I asked Carla Moreno, my tour guide and the unofficial town historian of Teotitlan. I had met Carla a week earlier at a writers' conference in Oaxaca city, and over a drink of *mescal* she had offered to show me around her hometown.

"*Fueron al Norte*," Carla said with a sad smile. "They went north. To the U.S."

I couldn't believe it. Migration seemed to have hit Teotitlan like a plague, wiping out the town's sons and fathers in one generational swoop. How was this possible?

"This is how," Carla said. She pulled out two ears of corn, already shucked.

One corn was yellow, the kind I've devoured at many a Labor Day barbecue. The other corn, howev-

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Josh Healey is a writer, performer, and proud member of Gringos for Immigrant Rights. Based in Oakland, he tweets political jokes and revolutionary haiku at @mrjoshhealey.

er, was a color my gringo eyes had never seen before: It was blue. A royal, purplish blue, with the occasional red or yellow kernel thrown in like abstract art.

"This," Carla said, holding up the blue species, "is one of our native corns we grow here in Oaxaca."

"And this one," she continued, now holding the yellow corn, "is from Iowa. American corn, subsidized by the American government, that has made it impossible for Mexican farmers to make a living. Farmers like my brother Luis."

Carla glanced around the village, like she was searching for a ghost.

"You want to know why Mexicans are taking over America?" she said. "Because American corn is taking over Mexico."

Corn is everywhere in Oaxaca, in every shape and size imaginable. Oaxaca is home to 85,000 unique varieties of corn, possibly the greatest diversity of any crop in the world. 85,000 types of corn! Think of all the different colors and flavors that could produce. Purple popcorn! Spicy red cornflakes!

My mind raced with the culinary possibilities, but for Carla, corn is more than a meal. Indeed, for the indigenous peoples of Mexico and Central America, corn is central to their culture. The Zapotec people of Oaxaca pray for the blessings of Pitao Cozobi, the god of maize. In Chiapas, one state south, the Mayan holy book teaches that God created man himself from an ear of corn.

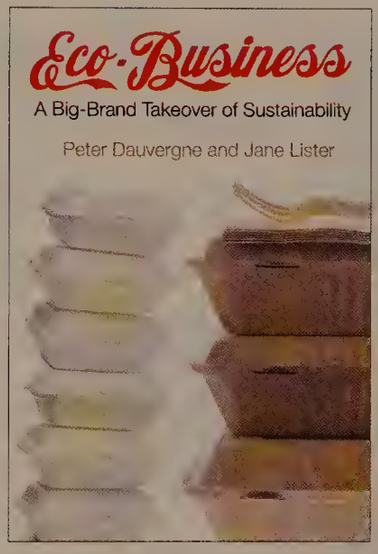
Corn may be a spiritual matter only for some Mexicans, but it is an economic issue for many more. Approximately 20 percent of Mexico's 110 million citizens depend directly on corn farming and related businesses for their livelihood. And for the last two decades, that way of life has been under attack by a simple acronym with a nasty, neoliberal bite: NAFTA.

When the North American Free Trade Agreement went into effect in 1994, it removed nearly all corporate trade barriers between the United States and Mexico. Among the industries affected was agriculture, forcing small Mexican farmers into direct competition with big American agribusiness. Cheap American corn—heavily subsidized, mechanized, and oh, yes, genetically modified—soon flooded the Mexican market, undercutting local farmers' prices.

In the last eighteen years, the share of American corn in Mexico has jumped at least 500 percent. And just as millions of industrial workers in the United States lost their jobs in the free-trade outsourcing bonanza, rural Mexicans suffered a parallel fate. Even by cautious estimates, NAFTA is directly responsible for the loss of two million farm jobs in Mexico.

One of those farmers was Luis Moreno, Carla's brother.

The MIT Press



Eco-Business
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Peter Dauvergne and Jane Lister
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"How could he compete with something like Cargill?" Carla asked, speaking the name of the U.S. agricultural giant like it was a mythical dragon.

"He couldn't, but he still had a wife and three kids," Carla continued. "So Luis left to find work. First to Mexico City. Then to Kansas City. He's been there for nine years now, cleaning office buildings. His kids only know him on the phone."

Luis was nearly caught and deported a few years ago, Carla told me. That was November 2008. The same month, I realized, that Barack Obama was elected President.

In his first term, President Obama deported over 1.5 million men, women, and children to their countries of origin, primarily Mexico. The son of a Kenyan foreign exchange student, Obama now holds the dubious distinction of deporting foreign-born residents at a higher rate than any President in U.S. history.

Recently, though, Obama has taken steps towards a more humane immigration policy. Last June, he announced a new policy that temporarily stopped the threat of deportation for certain undocumented youth. And after winning reelection with a whopping 71 percent of the Latino vote, Obama has made immigration reform a top legislative priority.

Not to be outdone, and facing the electoral reality of a browning America, even some Republicans are changing their tone on immigration. (Think less Jan Brewer, more Marco Rubio.)

Yet with all the talk about "comprehensive immigration reform," no one in Washington is asking the most basic question: Why are millions of people leaving their homes to come here? Why did Luis Moreno leave his family, pay his life savings to a backstabbing coyote, cross a desert where he nearly starved, risk jail and death and a thousand other dangers—all to work as a janitor in Kansas City?

No immigration reform can be called comprehensive if it doesn't address NAFTA. Or CAFTA, its Central American counterpart. Or the legacy of U.S. corporate-military interventions throughout the Western Hemisphere, from Chile to Guatemala to the human rights disaster known as the War on Drugs. Immigration is about both the push and the pull, and the American Dream looks way better when the CIA has made your own country feel like a nightmare.

Making those connections—between immigration and labor, food justice and foreign policy—isn't easy, but it's the only path to real justice on both sides of the border. This larger vision won't come from Washington. It can only come from the grassroots, a true globalization from below.

Cargill and other U.S. companies are destroying Mexico's multicolored crop.

Where is this movement happening?

Look no further than groups like the DREAMers, the courageous immigrant youth who come out as "undocumented and unafraid."

It's happening in the Dignity Campaign, which fights for immigrant rights and fair trade as one and the same.

And it's happening among the millions of immigrant families—and among their friends, teachers, and coworkers of every legal status—who refuse to allow human beings to be criminalized for trying to survive.

The movement is getting stronger, and as I saw at a recent protest, it's growing in beautifully unexpected ways.

It was a foggy San Francisco day in December. I joined 200 protesters outside the Immigration and Customs Enforcement regional headquarters. We were there to rally against the deportation of Jesus Ruiz Diego, twenty-six, who had lived in the United States since he was brought over from Mexico by his parents at the age of four.

The crowd was young, mainly under thirty. Mostly Latino, but I spotted a good number of Asians, whites, and black folks in the crowd. This was the new face of America, I thought, the new face of activism. And then, near the back, an older woman caught my eye.

She was little more than five feet tall, with broad hips and a broader smile. With each loud, Spanish chant, she threw up her fist—and when she did, I noticed what she was holding in her hand. There in downtown San Francisco, this woman was clutching a small, but unmistakable, piece of blue corn.

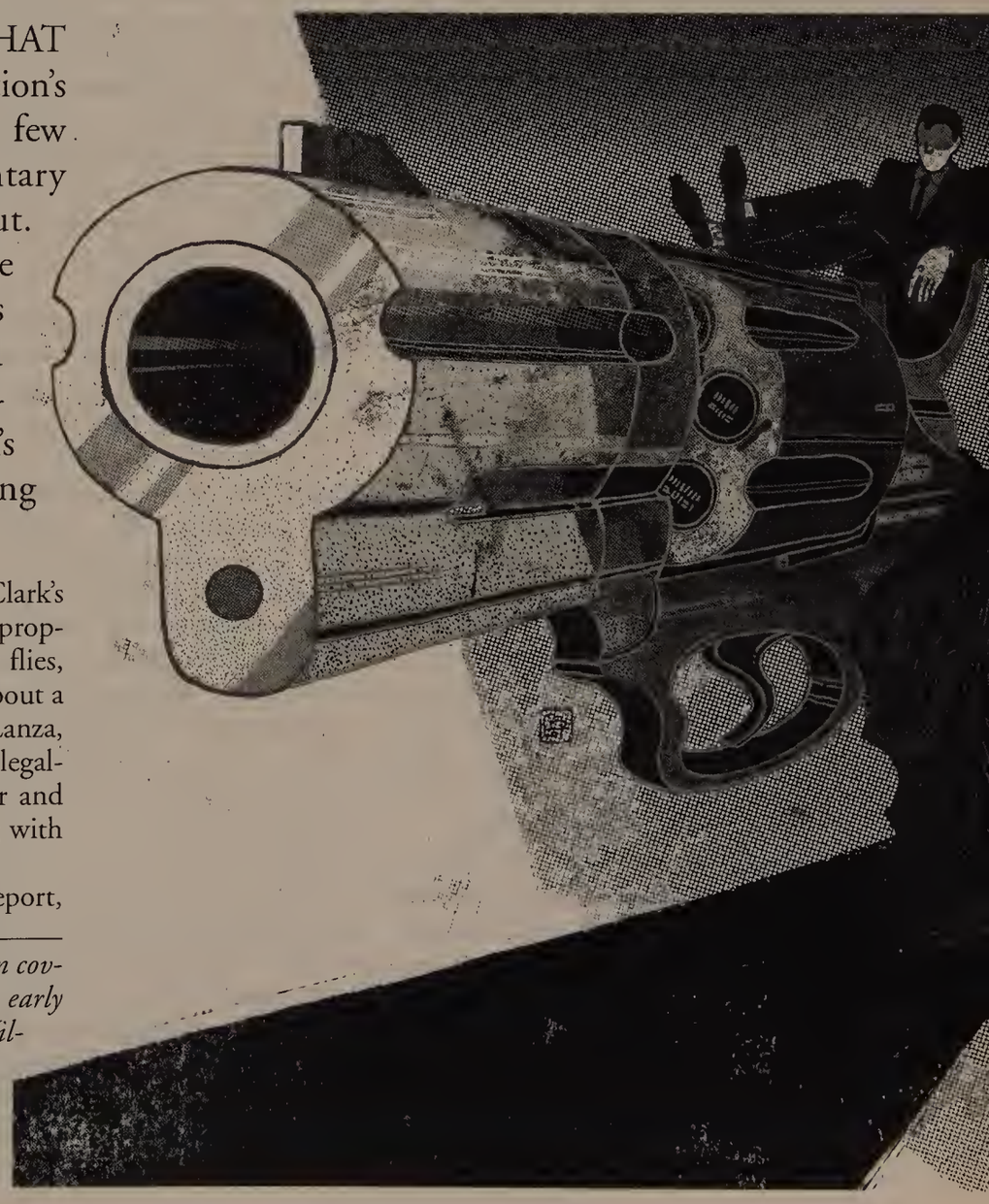
Could it be? Was blue corn some sort of new symbol for the movement, like the red star or black mask? Back in Oaxaca, I could imagine Carla smiling wide.

But before I could ask the woman if she had another ear I could raise in solidarity, she put the corn to her mouth—and took a big, satisfying bite. This was no symbol, I realized. This was lunch. And no border wall, no free trade pact, can ever stop people trying to survive. ◆

By Frank Smyth
Illustration by Victo Ngai

Inside the NRA's Secret Council

I BET YOU DIDN'T KNOW THAT one of the National Rifle Association's most trusted officials lives just a few miles from Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, Connecticut. Patricia A. Clark has been on the NRA's governing board of directors since 1999. In 2011, the board appointed the longtime Newtown resident to be chairman of the NRA's shadowy but powerful Nominating Committee.



Newtown is a small community. Chairman Clark's three-bedroom home on about eleven acres of property is about two-and-a-half miles, as the crow flies, from the Sandy Hook school. Clark's home is about a fifteen-minute drive from the home of Nancy Lanza, whose apparently mentally ill son used her own legally registered weapons in their house to kill her and then, after a short drive, twenty children along with six adults inside the school.

Reached by telephone at her office in Bridgeport,

Frank Smyth is a freelance journalist who has been covering the NRA and related groups since the early 1990s, writing for publications including The Village Voice, The Washington Post, The Texas Observer, and Mother Jones. Parts of this piece appeared originally on motherjones.com and then on progressive.org.

Connecticut, Clark confirmed that she is an NRA board member. When asked if she knew any of the victims or their families in Newtown, where she has lived for the past twenty-seven years, she replied, "This is a hard time for me. I am not really interested in giving an interview at this time."

Clark's reluctance to talk is nothing new for members of the NRA's board of directors. They don't want people to notice who runs the gun lobby in the name of the millions of Americans, including me, who own guns.

Last year, before Sandy Hook and before the mass shooting at the theater in Aurora, Colorado, Republican pollster Frank Luntz found that most gun owners—including members of the NRA—actually favor more gun regulations. But they don't get much of a say in the organization's policies because the NRA operates more like the Soviet Politburo than other nonprofit membership organizations.

Opening up the inner workings of the NRA may help us understand how the organization distorts the national debate so badly.

The NRA's internal elections are tightly controlled. In most years, like 2012, they involve no more than 7 percent of NRA members. With gun rights such a hot issue among gun owners, why is turnout for the NRA's own elections so small?

One reason is that the NRA limits who can vote. You must be either an NRA life member, which costs $1,000, or an annual member ($35) for at least five consecutive years.

Another reason relates to how a candidate for the seventy-six-member NRA board even gets his or her name on the ballot. It requires either a grassroots petition by members, which is rare, or an endorsement by the NRA's ten-member Nominating Committee—the one Patti Clark sits on and was chair of in 2011 and 2012.

"Reading the bios in your ballot and you'll see that almost all were nominated by the nominating committee," complained "Pecos Bill" from Illinois this January in one pro-gun-rights online forum. "Seems the NRA, fine organization that it is, is being run like a modern corporation and the 'good ol' boys' are keeping themselves in power."

Clark has put the most positive spin on the process the committee uses to nominate board members.

"Committee members set aside friendships and personal relationships and placed considerable weight on protection of the Second Amendment; leadership abilities; business expertise; legislative and financial experience; understanding of the importance and need for NRA's wide range of safety, training, and shooting programs; past performance; and potential capabilities," reads a September 17-18, 2011, Report of the Nominating Committee meeting signed by Clark and found among the publicly available online archives of not the NRA, but of Florida's NRA state association.

One of the figures whom the NRA board quietly appointed to the 2012 Nominating Committee is George Kollitides II, the chief executive of one of America's largest consortiums of gun manufacturers. Kollitides last year also became head of Freedom Group, a consortium of gun manufacturers, including the company that made the Bushmaster semi-automatic rifle used not just at the Sandy Hook school in Newtown, but also at last year's movie theater shooting in Aurora, Colorado, and, a decade before, by the D.C. sniper in and around Washington.

Any NRA members seeking to influence policy one way or another have little chance as long as the Nominating Committee handpicks almost every candidate on the ballot. Only in December did the NRA finally post a list of its board. In previous years, instead of the NRA, another nonprofit organization—a gun control group—used its website to post the (often outdated) names and bios of NRA directors.

Who else is on the NRA board? Following the lead of the actor most famous for playing Moses, a number of prominent figures have become NRA directors since the late 1990s: the actor Tom Selleck, who is often a top vote getter; former Georgia Republican Representative Bob Barr; Oliver North, the former National Security Council official at the center of the "Iran-Contra affair" and who is now a Fox News Channel documentary host; Grover Norquist, the Republican lobbyist and anti-tax pledge campaigner; and David Keene, former head of the American Conservative Union.

The NRA's most influential directors have served for decades. *Soldier of Fortune* editor Robert K. Brown is a former U.S. Army lieutenant colonel and special operations commander in Vietnam. The NRA's first woman president was Marion P. Hammer, who helped advocate for her own state of Florida to pass permissive concealed-weapon and stand-your-ground laws. Longtime NRA director Ted Nugent is less influential if more outrageous.

Former Idaho Senator Larry Craig is among the longest serving NRA directors, having joined the board twenty-four years before claiming to have a "wide stance" in response to 2007 lewd conduct charges in a men's restroom at the Minneapolis-St. Paul International Airport.

Other longstanding NRA directors seem to reflect an almost postmodern sense of diversity. Sandra Froman is another past NRA president, one with top academic credentials as a Stanford University and Harvard Law School graduate. She became a gun rights advocate after a 1981 break-in at her Hollywood Hills home. Roy Innis is a former Harlem-based civil rights-era figure. Karl Malone is a former Utah Jazz basketball star.

Two gun-making firms' chief executive officers, Ronnie Barrett and

Pete Brownell, sit on the NRA board. And it should be noted that NRA revenues from fundraising—including donations from gun manufacturers—have grown twice as fast as income from members' dues, according to *Forbes*. More than fifty firearms-related companies have given the NRA almost $15 million since 2005—the same year that NRA lobbyists helped get a federal law passed that limits liability claims against gun makers.

Yet nearly half of the NRA's total annual revenues still come from its (rarely voting) dues-paying members.

Real power within the NRA is held by the organization's chief executive officer and executive vice president, which for the past twenty-two years has been Wayne LaPierre.

LaPierre became the NRA's operations chief in 1991, right before a series of notorious raids by U.S. agencies over illegal guns ended violently. In 1992, federal charges related to the sale of two illegal, sawed-off shotguns eventually led to a federal raid in Ruby Ridge, Idaho, resulting in the wounding of two men, including the suspect, Randy Weaver, who was a white separatist, and the killing of his wife and their fourteen-year-old son along with an agent of the U.S. Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms (ATF).

But it was another federal siege, this one over illegal, fully automatic firearms, less than a year later, that became nothing less than a call to arms for gun rights hardliners. In February 1993, federal ATF agents attempted to serve a search warrant to look for firearms at the compound of a small religious sect known as the Branch Davidians in Waco, Texas. After a fifty-day standoff, ATF agents launched an assault, and the ensuing firefight, along with a fire of still unclear origins, resulted in the deaths of at least seventy-four people, including twenty-five children.

LaPierre soon wrote unambiguously in his first book published the following year: "The people have a right to take whatever measures necessary, including force, to abolish oppressive government."

A few months after Congress passed and President Clinton signed the assault weapons ban, prohibiting a number of high-capacity, semi-automatic weapons, LaPierre signed a fund-raising letter to NRA members: "The semiauto ban gives jack-booted government thugs more power to take away our constitutional rights, break in our doors, seize our guns, destroy our property, and even injure or kill us."

But his timing was unfortunate for his cause. Six days later, on exactly the second anniversary of the Waco siege, Timothy McVeigh, an NRA member, used a fertilizer bomb hidden in a truck to blow up the federal building in Oklahoma City, killing 168 people, including nineteen children under the age of six. LaPierre was quickly forced to apologize for his "jack-booted" thugs reference, after former President George H. W. Bush, a decades-long member of the NRA, resigned from the organization over his letter. But few NRA members followed suit. Instead, the NRA has increased from three million then to more than four million members today.

"Our Second Amendment is freedom's most valuable, most cherished, most irreplaceable idea," he said last July. "History proves it. When you ignore the right of good people to own firearms to protect their freedom, you become the enablers of future tyrants whose regimes will destroy millions and millions of defenseless lives."

After Sandy Hook, he sang the same tune, urging gun owners to "stand and fight" for the Second Amendment and for the right to own "semi-automatic technology."

Would U.S. courts agree? In 2008, the Supreme Court made its first ruling on the Second Amendment in sixty-nine years. In *District of Columbia v. Heller,* it affirmed the right of an individual to keep a handgun in his or her home for self-defense within the district, and then in 2010 affirmed the same right throughout the United States. (Self-defense in the home is why I own a Glock.)

Yet Justice Antonin Scalia, writing for the majority, still allowed for some limits on the right to bear arms, including "laws forbidding the carrying of firearms in sensitive places such as schools and government buildings, or laws imposing conditions and qualifications on the commercial sale of arms." Scalia went on in his watershed 2008 majority opinion to say he could also find "support in the historical tradition of prohibiting the carrying of dangerous and unusual weapons." Exactly what kinds of weapons might meet that criteria, however, remain unclear.

Most gun owners in America are not preparing for some kind of apocalyptic disaster. Instead, they own guns for self-defense or for sport. But the glue that binds the men and women controlling the NRA board is, in a way, more extreme, as they demand their right to remain ready for apocalyptic or insurrectionist scenarios.

Providing unfettered access to enough firepower, as LaPierre's own writings suggest, to "take whatever measures necessary, including force, to abolish oppressive government" is simply incompatible with curing today's gun violence. For LaPierre and most NRA directors, including Patricia Clark, the slaying of twenty-seven people, including twenty children, in Newtown is an acceptable price to pay.

Today's NRA leaders are ideologues wielding extraordinary power, and secrecy is part of their success. After all, who knew their board's nominating chair lives just a few miles from the now shuttered Sandy Hook school? Or that the executive of the firm that made the gun that killed the kids there had been appointed to the same shadowy committee? ◆

Article and Photographs
By Julie Dermansky

Down the Hole:
How a Failed Salt Mine Cleared Out a Town

BAYOU CORNE, A PICTURESQUE fisherman's paradise seventy-seven miles from New Orleans, was once an idyllic spot full of birdsong and Spanish moss. Now it's known as the place with the sinkhole.

In early August of last year, the state of Louisiana called for a mandatory evacuation of the area. A salt cavern, owned by Texas Brine, had experienced a "frack out." Brine, water, and crude oil were forced out of the cavern, fracturing rock and creating a sinkhole that has now swallowed up more than eight acres and countless cypress trees. The community's homes are located less than half a mile away, and Highway 70, Bayou Corne's major road, is threatened.

There had been earlier indications of trouble: mysterious bubbles welling up in a swamp, and small tremors. The bubbles proved to be natural gas that escaped into the Mississippi aquifer as the salt mine began to fail. Residents were concerned. The Department of Natural Resources hadn't disclosed that it knew of a potential problem, even though Texas Brine alerted it in 2011 that the cavern had failed a

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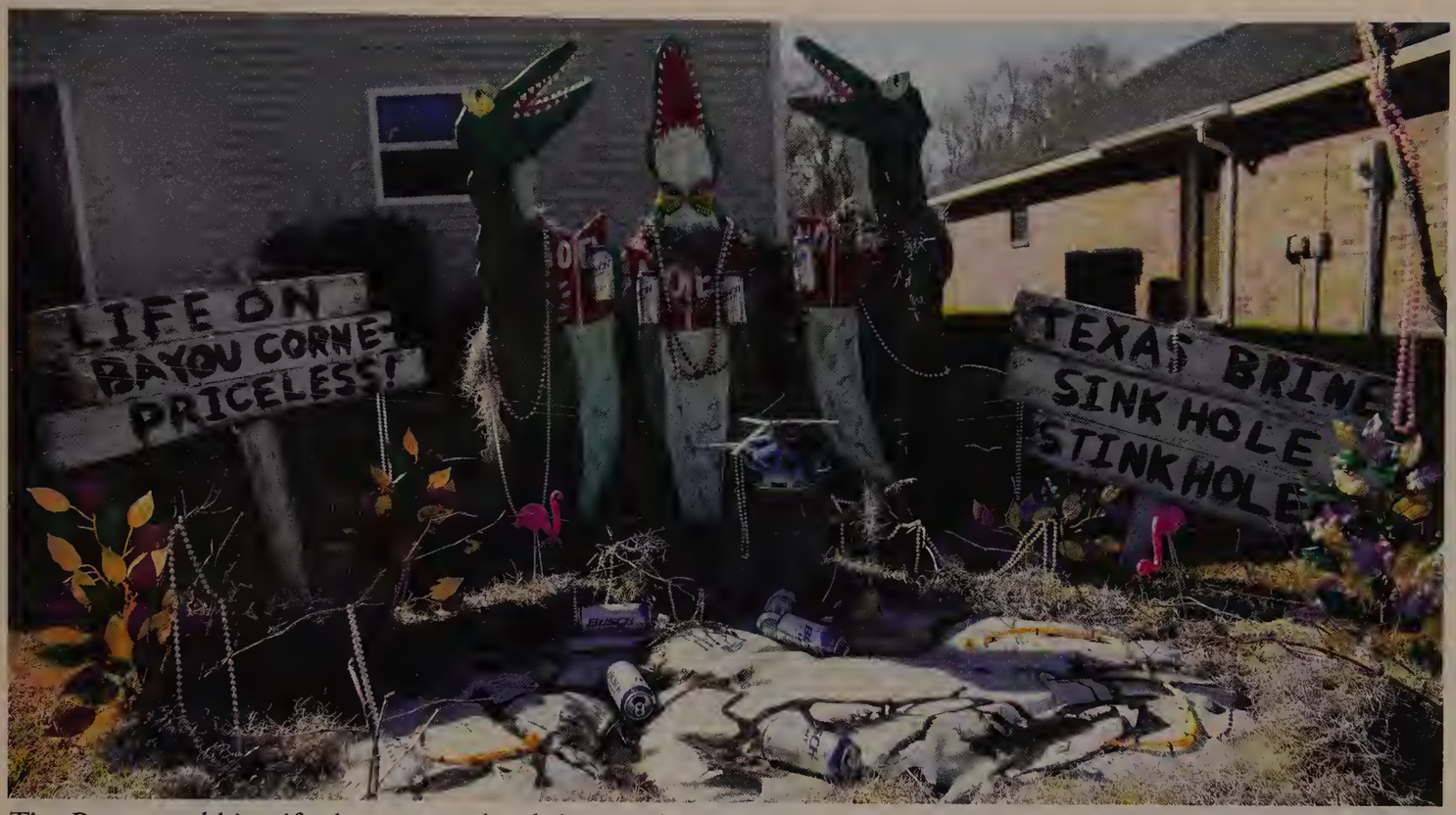
Julie Dermansky is a multimedia reporter and artist based in New Orleans. She is an affiliate scholar at the Center for the Study of Genocide, Conflict Resolution, and Human Rights. She is also a contributor to the Atlantic Wire. Her work deals with social protest, climate change, and natural history. Visit her website at jsdart.com.



Tim Brown and his wife chose not to heed the mandatory evacuation orders and remained in their home. The signs in their yard express their fustration.

mechanical integrity test.

The residents feel let down by the Department of Natural Resources.

John Achee, whose fishing camp is on the bayou, has called for Governor Bobby Jindal to bring in the federal government, accusing state officials of incompetence and corruption.

Jamie Weber, who evacuated her house, says her two-year-old daughter Ariana is desperate to go home.

"It's all she's known since birth," she says. "She's scared to sleep in her room in the rental we stay in."

Texas Brine is providing state-mandated compensation to the community but refuses to take responsibility for the sinkhole. The U.S. Geological Survey determined that the cavern collapse caused the tremors, but Sonny Cranch, Texas Brine's PR representative, suggests that seismic activity may have been the culprit. Texas Brine is building a giant berm around the sinkhole—further insurance that that there will be no pollution, he asserts. MacArthur Fellow Wilma Subra, an environmental chemist who works

Charlie Hayden recently relocated away from Bayou Corne after earth tremors frightened his kids.

with the Louisiana Environmental Action Network (LEAN), disagrees. She says it's too soon to talk about the long-term environmental impact on the swamp. LEAN recently photographed an oil sheen half a mile away from the boomed-off site.

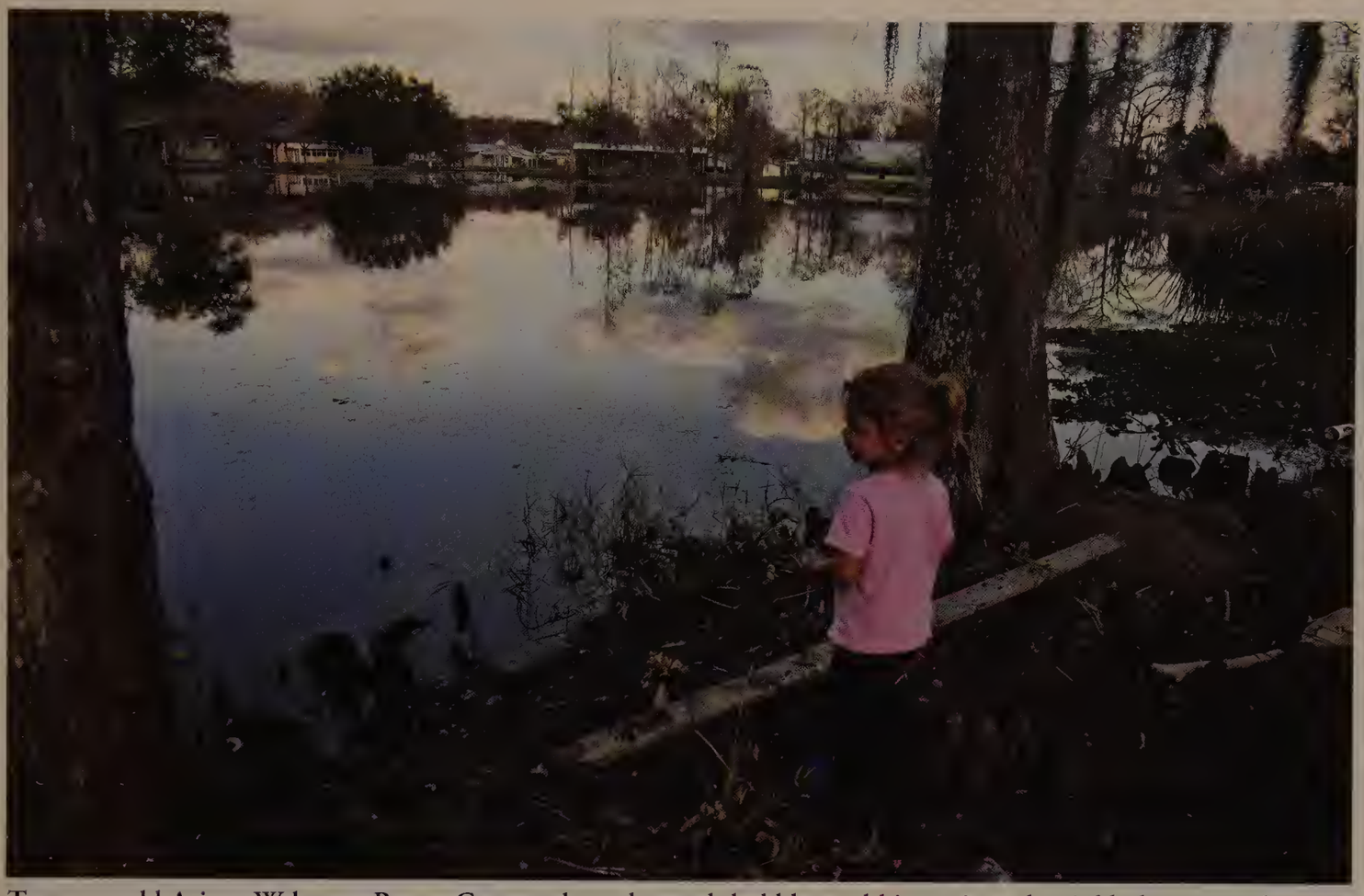
Many in the community want to be bought out by Texas Brine. Instead, they receive a cost-of-living allowance of $3,500 a month. Some are afraid the sinkhole will introduce carcinogens into a community where almost every household already seems to have someone who has cancer or died of the disease. The fumes created by the crude oil on top of the sinkhole cause itchy eyes and respiratory congestion.

Bubbles rising out of Triche Canal in Bayou Corne. New sites where natural gas is coming up began appearing about a month before the sinkhole suddenly emerged.

Resident Michael Schaff calls the sinkhole a "stink hole" because of the odor caused by the frequent releases of crude into the lake formed by the sinkhole. He is more worried about his spiking blood pressure than cancer. He wants Texas Brine to clean up the area, but he has begun to accept the idea that staying put may not be an option.

Henry Welch and his wife Carolyn, who bought a house in Bayou Corne for their retirement, have relocated to a trailer park eight miles away. Carolyn recently finished breast cancer treatment and doesn't want to risk exposure to a potentially

Lilia Alleman briefly returned home with her grandmother, Carla, and played on the swingset that was built for her just before the sinkhole came to be. She refers to her home as the sinkhole house.



Two-year-old Ariana Weber, at Bayou Corne, where the earth bubbles and hisses since the sinkhole appeared.

toxic environment.

At a January 31 community meeting, Texas Brine representatives claimed the sinkhole is more stable then ever. Robert L. Thoms, an engineer with expertise on a new seismic 3D study of the cavern, was asked if he would let his grandchildren live in Bayou Corne. After a long pause, he said, "Yes, I would." The same question was put to Dr. Gary Hecox, leader of the Shaw Group's team of engineers and environmental experts who have been hired by the state. Hecox answered unequivocally: "No. The mandatory evacuation is still in effect and for good reason."

Besides the unknown long-term effects of released chemicals, natural gas could fill a home or shed and explode. More sinister yet is the hydrogen sulfide gas detected at the site that is poisonous at high concentrations.

Some of Bayou Corne's 300 residents are still living in their homes, despite the evacuation order.

Mona Branum, seventy-eight-years-old, told me she would like to relocate, but she doesn't want to live in a trailer. Until Texas Brine buys her out, she will remain.

Carla Alleman has moved out of her home. "We are not only out of our homes, we are out of our lives," she says. When she and her husband built their dream home, they purchased the adjoining lots so their sons could do the same. Her sons lived in the two houses next to hers. She saw her grandchildren daily. Looking over her shoulder at the house she left behind, tears come to her eyes as she tells me how much she loved the place.

Her son Brandon, who considers himself a private person, is ready to speak out after months of feeling deceived and ignored by Texas Brine and local officials. He wants a buy-out. "If it could happen to me, it could happen to you," he says.

Mike Schaff told me the only good thing that has come from the disaster is that now he knows his neighbors, who used to be a quiet, private bunch. They realized early on that they needed to stick together to share information and fight back, which they are doing via Facebook groups and at meetings.

As Texas Brine sets up more gas vents around Bayou Corne, Schaff describes the night landscape as apocalyptic. He finds himself overwhelmed with sadness as he takes in a spectacular sunset while flying his Cessna over the sinkhole.

But Dennis Landry, owner of Cajun Cabins, whose boat launch has been rented out as a state command center, wants people to know that Bayou Corne's beauty has not been tarnished.

It is still a piece of paradise, he tells me, even though he and his wife Pat keep a bag packed by the door. ◆

FIRST PERSON SINGULAR
by Scot Ross

Student Debt Sucker Punch

MY NAME IS SCOT ROSS AND I'M A STUDENT LOAN DEBTOR. I know the regret of economic opportunity lost to a loan payment, the shame of living like a college student in a rented apartment until I was nearly forty, and the anger of feeling I've been denied the share of the American Dream promised to my generation.

But mine is the story of one of the lucky ones.

I spent the late 1980s and mid-'90s earning an English degree from a state university in Pennsylvania and a two-year master's degree in Washington, D.C. I also "earned" $62,845.17 in student loan debt on a repayment schedule of thirty years at 7.875 percent, compounded daily.

For fourteen years, I have religiously submitted monthly payments, at first making the minimum and then, as my income rose, increasing my restitution.

I rented apartments until age thirty-seven, and I spent years cruising in a maroon four-door sedan, so old it was still equipped with a cassette player.

But I can see a faint light at the end of the tunnel. I hope to pay off the remaining $23,000 of my debt over the next twenty-four months, liberating myself from what felt over the many years like an economic prison term.

But mine is the story of one of the lucky ones.

I am not the schoolteacher working on a master's trying to earn a raise only to see my salary capped as public education is attacked in the name of austerity.

I am not the newly unemployed worker who got locked into the for-profit college racket in an attempt to get new skills for a handful of available jobs.

I am not a student whose family is trying to finance higher education in the aftermath of the worst economic crisis since the Great Depression.

Nor am I the parent who co-signed my child's loan, only to see her struggle to repay her debt, and consequently have my retirement savings wiped out or my Social Security garnished.

No, I am one of the lucky ones. And I know it.

I know it from original research on the student loan debt crisis we did at my organization, One Wisconsin Institute. We're part of the national ProgressNow Education network and a growing national movement to undo student loan debt. Our research shows how the burden of student debt crushes families and drags down the economy.

Here's one example: Where a bachelor's degree used to mean paying off your student loans in fewer than ten years, loan terms in Wisconsin now average

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Scot Ross is the executive director of One Wisconsin Institute, a progressive statewide research and education organization based in Madison, Wisconsin.

eighteen years.

But numbers are numbers. More heartbreaking are the stories sent to us by many of the 3,000 men and women who responded to our survey.

Take these stories (names changed to protect the victims):

"At the age of seventeen, I was suckered into a for-profit college with the promises of a job upon graduation and a great degree. Well, I came to find out their employment rates were padded, the instructors were less than helpful, and the school is frowned upon by potential employers. Now at the age of twenty-seven, I have over $45,000 in federal and private student loans. They have been in deferment for over a year because I could not afford to make payments on my income and keep food on the table and a roof over my head."

"Melanie" continues: "This will not only affect my life, but it will affect my children's lives as well. Although I know it is not a healthy or reasonable option, I have thought suicide would be my only way out as student loans are not dischargeable in bankruptcy. Until something changes beyond my control, I will just keep trying to stay afloat and praying I win the lottery."

"Tara" reported: "I finished paying my student loan debt while in my early thirties. Unfortunately, I was not able to save money for my kids' education so at forty-six I am making payments on the student loans ($15,000 worth) that parents take out when their kids can't borrow enough money themselves."

I decided to ask my mom, a retired middle-school reading teacher, about her college debt experience. She was a first-generation college student and the daughter of a farmer and a lunch lady. She went to a state college to get her teaching degree in the late 1960s. Her total expenses for a year of school and room and board were $1,000. She got out of college with a $50-a-month loan payment that ended in five years. She offset many of her costs by working during the summer in a nearby mushroom mine.

Seems a fair investment in education—and a reasonable term of repayment. But it's such an anachronism. Today, students can no longer work a summer job and part-time during the school year to cover their costs.

BARRY BRUNER

Wisconsin state senator Chris Larson knows all too well the epidemic of student loan debt and has personally seen the problem grow because of failed governmental priorities. In fact, the thirty-two-year-old senate Democratic leader notes that years after graduating he is still carrying enormous student loan debt.

"Student loan debt is the looming crisis for our economy," Larson tells me. "With over $20,000 that I still owe, my family knows first-hand the effects it can have on a household budget. Every time our state budgets shortchange our university and technical college students, we just drive those students further away from their chance at the American Dream."

Wisconsin, under Governor Scott Walker, had the third-highest decrease in state spending on higher education in 2011, triggering a $107 million tuition hike.

Almost twenty years since rules on student loans were modified to benefit private lenders, it's time we make real change. We must eliminate special privileges for banks that finance student loans, restore consumer protections like truth in lending requirements, and crack down on abusive collection practices.

If we fail, there will be even fewer of the "lucky" ones, like me. ◆

Art for Wisconsin

By Guy Billout

by David Barsamian

David Suzuki

Everyone knows David Suzuki in Canada. He was born in 1936 in Vancouver, and was interned at a Japanese-Canadian relocation camp during the war years. He attended Amherst College in Massachusetts and received his Ph.D. in zoology from the University of Chicago. The recipient of numerous awards, including the Right Livelihood Award (often called the "Alternative Nobel") and UNESCO's Kalinga Prize for the Popularization of Science, Suzuki is professor emeritus at the University of British Columbia. The host of the long-running CBC-TV program *The Nature of Things*, he has written more

David Barsamian is the founder and director of Alternative Radio, www.alternativeradio.org. His last interview for The Progressive was with Jodie Evans in November 2011. His latest books are "Occupy the Economy, with Richard Wolff" and "Power Systems, with Noam Chomsky."

than fifty books, and his latest is *Everything Under the Sun: Toward a Brighter Future on a Small Blue Planet*.

Bill McKibben says, "There's really no one on Earth quite like David Suzuki." He's got that right. Suzuki is a veritable ball of energy. He is animated when talking about nature.

He stresses, in Buddhist fashion, the interconnectedness of the multiple environmental issues and crises. And citing the explosion of pine beetles in northwestern Canada, he says, "Climate change illustrates the degree of interconnectivity."

His fervor for science and nature bubbles to the surface as he speaks rapidly in whole paragraphs. He gets the connection between capitalism and the environment when he comments, "The world's seven most profitable companies are oil and gas." But he doesn't stop there. And he reminds us that the words "economy" and "ecology" come from the same root: *ecos*, which means "household" in Greek.

I met with him in November in Santa Fe at the Lannan Foundation, where he was giving a lecture.

Q • Talk about your background and how that • shaped your worldview.

David Suzuki: My parents were born and raised in Canada. After Pearl Harbor, the Canadian government invoked the War Measures Act, and all Japanese, whether we were born in Canada or not, were rounded up and incarcerated. The government froze everyone's bank assets, and they confiscated my parents' dry-cleaning business. My parents lost everything. We were allowed to take seventy pounds per person to the camps with us, and that was it. And then as the war was drawing to an end, British Columbia saw a chance to get rid of half of its "yellow peril" problem, so they decided to give Japanese Canadians incarcerated in the camps a choice: Renounce your citizenship and we'll give you a one-way ticket to Japan, or get out of British Columbia and go east of the Rocky Mountains.

The people were very angry at the government, of course, so there was a movement within the camps to sign up and go to Japan. Over 95 percent of the people in the camps did just that. There was a lot of pressure. If you didn't do that, you were called an "Inuit dog." My parents said, "We've never been to Japan. We're not going to go to a foreign country." They decided to stay in Canada and went to Ontario.

What Canada did to us by far was the most influential event in my life—to be a Canadian, to only know Canada, and to be rejected. My mom and dad were born in Canada, but they couldn't vote until after World War II. Asians, blacks, Native Canadians were not allowed to vote by law. So we've had to claw our way into a more democratic country.

Q: I saw a film clip of you visiting the camp where you were interred. It was in Slocan in the eastern part of British Columbia. And you choked up.

Suzuki: There are a lot of memories and ghosts there. An interesting thing was that most of the kids in the camp my age had parents who had come directly from Japan, so they spoke Japanese fluently. I didn't speak any Japanese because my parents spoke English at home. So the kids in the camp would beat me up because I wasn't one of them. I always say that my first personal experience with prejudice was from Japanese kids in the camp. I was really pissed off. I did not want to play with these kids. And I ended up in the woods all the time because I loved nature. Dad was an avid camper and fisherman. So I was just out fishing all the time. That really for me was the great bonding experience with the natural world.

The area that I hung out in, Slocan, is now a provincial park. It's a magnificent area that's protected. So by locking us away, way the heck up in the Rocky Mountains, they gave me the opportunity to be out there in the wild.

Q: When you moved to Ontario, what was that like?

Suzuki: I remember around 5:30, 6:00, every night, back doors would open and you would hear moms and dads yelling, "Johnny, Mary, time for dinner," because we were outside. I grew up in a family of six in London, Ontario. Our home was 1,000 square feet. The constant refrain in my life was, "David, go outside and play." "But, Mommy, it's raining out." "I don't care. Get your raincoat on, go call Bobby, and go out and play." The house was too small to have these kids cluttering it up.

"Go outside," we were told.

Today we say, "Don't go outside. There are speeding cars on the street or there are perverts or whatever lurking behind bushes." We haven't made it a child-friendly place.

So what happens? Today, children are spending the least amount of time outside of any generation in history. They're text-messaging, working on their computers, cellphones, all that stuff. There's a building body of evidence, scientific evidence, that we need nature, not just for our psychological health but for our physical health as well. Obesity is tied up in the fact that we don't even use our bodies to get out and walk.

We're letting machines do all of our work for us, yet our bodies evolved over hundreds of thousands of

years to move. And we're going against it by the kind of world we've created.

Q: You've said your father also helped sensitize you to nature.

Suzuki: My great elder and mentor was my father. In 1994, when he was eighty-five, he was dying of cancer. He knew it. Thank goodness it wasn't a painful form of cancer. I moved in to care for him the last month of his life. And that was one of the happiest times I spent with him. We talked and talked and we laughed and cried. He kept saying over and over, "David, I die a rich man." He had no money. But as we talked, he never once said, "Gee, you remember that closet full of fancy clothes? Do you remember that car I bought in 1988, or the house we owned in London, Ontario?" All he talked about was family, neighbors, and friends and the things that we did together. That to him was his wealth—the human relationships and the experiences together. We've got caught up in this weird thing of having newer and bigger stuff and thinking this is what makes us happy. That's total garbage. And that was a lesson I learned from my father as I watched him die with his dignity.

Q: You call yourself an elder now.

Suzuki: One of the things I tell old people, "Get the hell off the couch and off the golf course. This is the most important time of your life. Call yourself an elder, for God's sake. Don't be ashamed of it. You've earned the right to call yourself an elder." And what we have as elders is something no other group in society has: We have lived an entire life. Nobody can accuse us at this stage of wanting more fame or power or glory or money, or even sex. I find as my testosterone levels drop, geez, I get smarter and smarter. I'm not thinking about sex all the time. So I can troll through my life. And I've made a lot of mistakes. I've had a lot of failures. I've had a few successes. What the hell have I learned from that life lived? Every one of our elders ought to be going through their life and trying to get those nuggets of experience that they want to pass on to future generations.

Q: Last year marked the fiftieth anniversary of Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring*. You've said that she "had a tremendous influence" on you. In what way?

Suzuki: She was huge. She was the one who really set me off. When I got my first job as a professor of genetics, I was ready to set the world on fire. I was

JOHANNA GOODMAN

"We've got to design something that makes more human and biological sense."

this hotshot young geneticist, and I wanted to make my mark in the world of science. Then Rachel Carson brought out *Silent Spring*. As I read the book, it was like she punched me right in the head. I was dedicated to doing my genetics work in the lab focusing on a tiny part of nature on the assumption that if enough people focus on enough parts of nature, then, like a giant clock or a computer, you can just put all the parts back together again and construct the whole.

What Rachel Carson showed me was, the lab is not the real world. You can set up a lab and you can put a plant in there and an insect, spray it with DDT, show it kills the insect, doesn't do anything to the plant. Oh, that's great. We can kill our pests. But when you go out into the real world, guess what? Everything is connected to everything else.

So it rains, the sun shines, night comes, snow falls. And the DDT which you just sprayed on the field to kill the pests ends up in fish, birds, and human beings. So you can't duplicate the real world in the lab. What I am studying in the lab in many ways is an artifact. It's not a realistic mini-document of the real world. That for me was a huge insight.

While I did go on to a career in genetics, and I'm proud of what I did in that field, I could never look at what I was doing in the lab as something that you could extrapolate out into the real world. I was always aware of the limitations of reductionism.

And that's why over the years I've been one of the few geneticists to speak out strongly against the use of genetically modified organisms. We don't know enough to be able to manage their use properly.

Nature is completely interconnected and interdependent. Humans come along, and we think we can manage it? The only thing we can manage is ourselves. Humans are the only component in the biosphere that we have any possibility of controlling.

Q: How is climate change affecting Canada?

Suzuki: Of all the industrialized countries, Canada is probably the most vulnerable to climate change. We've already in British Columbia lost $65 billion worth of pine trees because of a tiny parasite called the mountain pine beetle that is the size of a grain of rice. They've been there for thousands of years, but they're kept under control by humidity and temperature. So as long as your winters go down to 30 below for up to five days at a time, then you keep that parasite under control. But we haven't had winters like that in years. So there is the mountain pine beetle, and there's also the spruce pine beetle and the Douglas fir beetle. We've already lost billions, billions of dollars of pine trees.

We are a northern country. We know that it's getting warmer very fast up here. It's all about the Arctic sea ice melting.

And our prime minister thinks, "Oh, well, this is great. Now we can drill and mine." But he doesn't understand ecology. As the ice melts, you get much more exposure of the ocean, which becomes this huge body that absorbs the sun's heat instead of reflecting it back out into space. We have the longest marine coastline of any country in the world, so sea-level rise is going to impact Canada more than any other country.

A recent poll found that 98 percent of Canadians accept that global warming is happening because we can see it. I guess the 2 percent that don't are the ones that are in Stephen Harper's government and cabinet.

Q: Is capitalism compatible with sustaining the environment?

Suzuki: It's absolutely not. The problem is, it's more than just capitalism. We've come to think that we're so smart that the inventions that we create have to dominate the way that we live on the planet. So we draw lines around our property, our counties, our cities, our states, our countries. And, boy, do we act as if those lines are important. I mean, we go to war. We will kill and die to protect those boundaries. Nature couldn't give two hoots about our national boundaries.

Then we create ideas like capitalism, economics, corporations, markets. These are not forces of nature, for heaven's sake. We invented them. And yet we now bow down before them.

I think of my neoliberal acquaintances. They seem pretty normal until you say "market." The minute you say "market," they say, "Oh, the market! Free the market! Hallelujah! Let the market do its thing!" My God, they act as if this is a real entity. We invented the god damn thing.

The idea that growth is an absolute essential is a very recent development. And nobody asks the important question: What is the growth for? We all say growth, growth. We've got to keep the economy going. Why? Are there no limits to this? How much is enough? Are we happier with all this stuff?

This is suicidal, because the biosphere, which is our home, is finite and fixed. It can't grow. The economic crisis is an opportunity to look back at ourselves and say, God, there's something wrong with this system and maybe we've gone down the wrong path.

We've got to design something that makes more human and biological sense. That's the challenge. ◆

Edge of Sports Dave Zirin

Prison-Athletic Complex

Sometimes the sports world doesn't just reflect the real world. It mocks our world with a vicious veracity. Recently, we learned that Florida Atlantic University had sold the naming rights to its football field. This isn't unusual at all, but the company the school chose among many suitors certainly was. The stadium will be known as GEO Group Stadium.

For those who have never heard about—or protested—GEO Group, it is a highly profitable private prison corporation. Governments across the world, from South Africa to the United Kingdom to Australia, pay the GEO Group to take over their jails and run them as privatized, for-profit enterprises.

In the United States, where the prison population has more than doubled since 1992 and is now the highest in the world, this is known as a growth industry. In many communities, where people of color are victimized by callously punitive laws (promoted by the lobbying arms of for-profit prisons), it's known as the New Jim Crow. The GEO group is the second largest for-profit prison company in the United States, behind only the Correctional Corporation of America.

Florida Atlantic University president Mary Jane Saunder gushed over the GEO Group payment of $6 million over the next twelve years for stadium naming rights. She called the GEO Group a "wonderful company" and said the university was "very proud to partner" with it. "This gift is a true representation of the GEO Group's incredible generosity to FAU and the community it serves," she said. Given how cash-strapped most universities are, and given how university presidents have increasingly become glorified fundraisers, her joy is unsurprising.

PATRICK MARTINEZ

But fortunately, her acceptance of this money is sparking anger and protest on campus and beyond.

"It's startling to see a stadium will be named after [the GEO Group]," Bob Libal, executive director of Grassroots Leaders, told *The New York Times*. "It's like calling something Blackwater Stadium. This is a company whose record is marred by human rights abuses, by lawsuits, by unnecessary deaths of people in their custody and a whole series of incidents that really draw into question their ability to successfully manage a prison facility."

Getting the naming rights is part and parcel of an effort by GEO Group CEO (and Florida Atlantic alum) George Zoley to rebrand the corporation as beneficent, as it undergoes a high-profile effort to take over a significant section of Florida's prison system, the third-largest in the United States. The company needs this makeover after being dogged with protests and lawsuits throughout the state on charges that it, as *The Palm Beach Post* reported, pads its "profits by cutting worker wages, skimping on inmate health care and ignoring safety and sanitation."

Undeterred, the GEO Group is

Dave Zirin is the host of Sirius XM Radio's popular weekly show, "Edge of Sports Radio." His newest book is "Game Over: How Politics Has Turned the Sports World Upside Down" (The New Press).

looking longingly at Florida's large population of undocumented workers, third highest in the nation. The future of private prisons may lie in warehousing many of these immigrants. It's a potential windfall worth billions of dollars to a company that already counts its earnings with nine zeroes. And it already has been cashing in on this bonanza, running the Broward Transitional Center for immigrants jailed for minor nonviolent offenses or for not having their papers in order.

Its record at Broward has been scandalous, according to the *Sun Sentinel*, which reported on an undercover investigation by immigrants that revealed "incidents of substandard or callous medical care, including a woman taken for ovarian surgery and returned the same day, still bleeding, to her cell, and a man who urinated blood for days but wasn't taken to see a doctor."

In Mississippi, the GEO Group also was embroiled in scandal for the way it ran the Walnut Grove Youth Correctional Facility in Mississippi. The Justice Department found that prison personnel engaged in "systemic, egregious and dangerous practices," including participating in gang fights. Guards and even the warden were allegedy engaging in sex with inmates, the report said, saying such practices were "among the worst that we've seen in any facility anywhere in the nation." A federal judge called the prison "a cesspool of unconstitutional and inhuman acts and conditions."

Six million dollars is a small price to pay for the kind of public relations that would whisk these scandals under the sand. The GEO Group aims to be as Florida as a roseate spoonbill and a glass of orange juice—or make that an orange jumpsuit.

Students understand this reality and aren't going to just let it happen without putting up a fight. "The fact that they are locking up people of color and immigrants like my parents is shameful," says Noor Fawzy, a twenty-two-year-old member of the student government whose parents are Palestinian immigrants. "We don't want our university to be associated with an entity that is being investigated for human rights abuses." Other students who have had relatives locked away in GEO facilities and emerged with horror stories of mistreatment, are also speaking out.

It's long been said that for too many people of color in the state of Florida, your future is confined to either playing football or ending up in the penitentiary. Universities like Florida Atlantic are supposed to represent an alternative to that kind of dystopic state of affairs. Florida Atlantic may go down in history as the school that dropped all pretense and brought the gridiron and the prison together. ◆

New Books for Spring from
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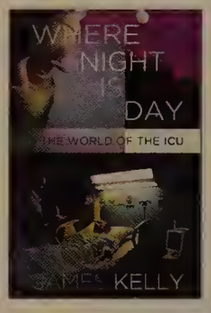

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Republican Cage Battles

Relax. Settle down. It's not necessarily the flu making you jittery, confused, and feverish. Could very well be radioactive spatter from that big, thick, juicy, new, improved civil war waging within the Republican Party. Yes, again. The Rebs are rebooting for the umpteenth time. And the big money is praying these self-proclaimed frugal guys purchased their huge caches of defibrillators and CPR paddles in bulk from Costco. "CLEAR!"

Change may emanate from the top, but in a blast from nearer the rump of the totem, Karl Rove announced the formation of a brand new Super PAC. It's the first of what might be known as the Super Duper PACs. Initial reports have the man affectionately referred to as Turd Blossom and Bush's Brain calling his Frankenstein fund-raising monster the "Conservative Victory Party."

Sounds like a natural response coming from the guy who famously threw an Election Night Hissy Fit on Fox News because Mitt Romney wasn't being properly victorious enough. "Wait, wait, wait. No, I'm telling you, it's not over. There's a cul-de-sac in a suburb on the outskirts of Shaker Heights that hasn't checked in yet!"

Rove outlined plans to siphon large piles of cash from donors to support moderates in primary elections so Republicans no longer have to enter the generals defending some bat guano crazy candidate like Christine "I Am Not a Witch" O'Donnell or Todd "Magic Fallopian Tube" Akin. Of course, the Tea Party has taken great offense to this move, seeing it as incredibly hostile toward their bat guano crazy candidates.

PAUL CORIO

So you got those two factions going at it. And with looming demographic flips in mind, there's a battle brewing to make the party more attractive to Hispanics. This undertaking has fallen into two camps: those arguing to temper policies opposing immigration reform, and those favoring more cosmetic solutions like wearing sombreros.

Meeting on this great national battlefield, opponents continue to quarrel over the Rights of the Right. One side holds their principles to be inviolate while others fear slavish fealty to outdated values will condemn them to permanent minority status in national contests. House Speaker John Boehner is finding these skirmishes harder to control than herding drunken blind cats over a frozen pond during an overhead fireworks show.

Another rift surfaced when Kentucky Senator Rand Paul insisted on giving a blood-thirsty unofficial response to the official State of the Union Response by the agua thirsty Florida Senator Marco Rubio. Right after Louisiana Governor Bobby Jindal gave a speech pleading for his compatriots to stop being the "stupid party."

The Party of Lincoln remains so obstinate and unwilling to give the black guy in the White House even the tiniest of victories, they filibustered one of his cabinet appointments . . . from their own party. Causing Democrats, usually known for eating their own, to salivate like perched vultures watching a field of hyenas tear each other apart for the last antelope thigh.

The situation reminds one of the old Cage Battles Royale put on by the World Wrestling Federation back in the early '80s. Where fifteen guys got into the ring with a chair, beat each other up, and the last one standing wins. Maybe that's what the GOP needs: a Hulk Hogan to pummel everyone back into place. Although that said, Karl Rove has always seemed more like the Rowdy Roddy Piper type. "CLEAR!" ◆

Five-time Emmy-nominee Will Durst's e-book "Elect to Laugh!," published by Hyperink, is now available at Redroom.com, Amazon, and many other fine virtual book retailers near you. Go to willdurst.com for information on his stand-up performances.

Poem

Since My Grandson's in the Army

The hardest time is when I'm home alone. After breakfast, straightening
the living room, stacking yesterday's newspapers or dusting the leather sofa
where we read together weekends when he was small.
He always surprised me at first glance because he looked exactly like my son.
In photographs, I could tell them apart only by their clothes.

As I fold the laundry, I enter the dust colored world of war.
Over and over images layer in. A transport truck
with the front end blown out, troops on foot clearing an area
house by house, guns drawn. A soldier on a stretcher
rushed into the operating bay, blood running down his face.

I hold my breath until the air runs out. When I breathe again
all the grandmothers come rushing in, Afghan, Iraqi and soon others too.
As they shake their rugs and rearrange their pillows thinking
of their sons and grandsons, they too struggle to hold back tears.
They too worry and set their cups back on the shelf.

—Carol Steele

Carol Steele lives near Santa Cruz, California, and has been keeping a record in poetry since her grandson joined the Army.

Assassination Porn

Killing Lincoln: The Shocking Assassination That Changed America Forever
By Bill O'Reilly and Martin Dugard
Henry Holt. 336 pages. $28.
Killing Kennedy: The End of Camelot
By Bill O'Reilly and Martin Dugard
Henry Holt. 336 pages. $28.

By Ian Murphy

Like every American, I'll never forget exactly where I was, what I was wearing, and how it felt when I received the horrific news that Matt Rothschild wanted me to review two Bill O'Reilly books. Zombie-like, but accepting of my disturbing fate, I solemnly made my way to the closest book depository. I'd never be the same.

The last book I reviewed was in third grade called *Bunnicula,* a delightful story about a pet bunny turned vampire menace, so I frankly wasn't sure I was ready for serious and challenging adult nonfiction. Fortunately, these *Times* bestsellers—much like *The O'Reilly Factor*—seem geared toward grade school children. Some writers conjure magic with a Hemingwayesque simplicity of prose. The simple sentence structures and narratives in these tracks, however, come off as, well, just simple. (The brain is "protected on the outside by the skull," for example.)

As O'Reilly told the folks on *Fox and Friends*, he and his co-author Martin Dugard didn't want to retread the same old boring history; they were aiming for crime thrillers instead. But the subjects don't exactly lend themselves to mystery, and the dramatic liberties somehow lessen the suspense.

Ian Murphy is the editor of buffalobeast.com.

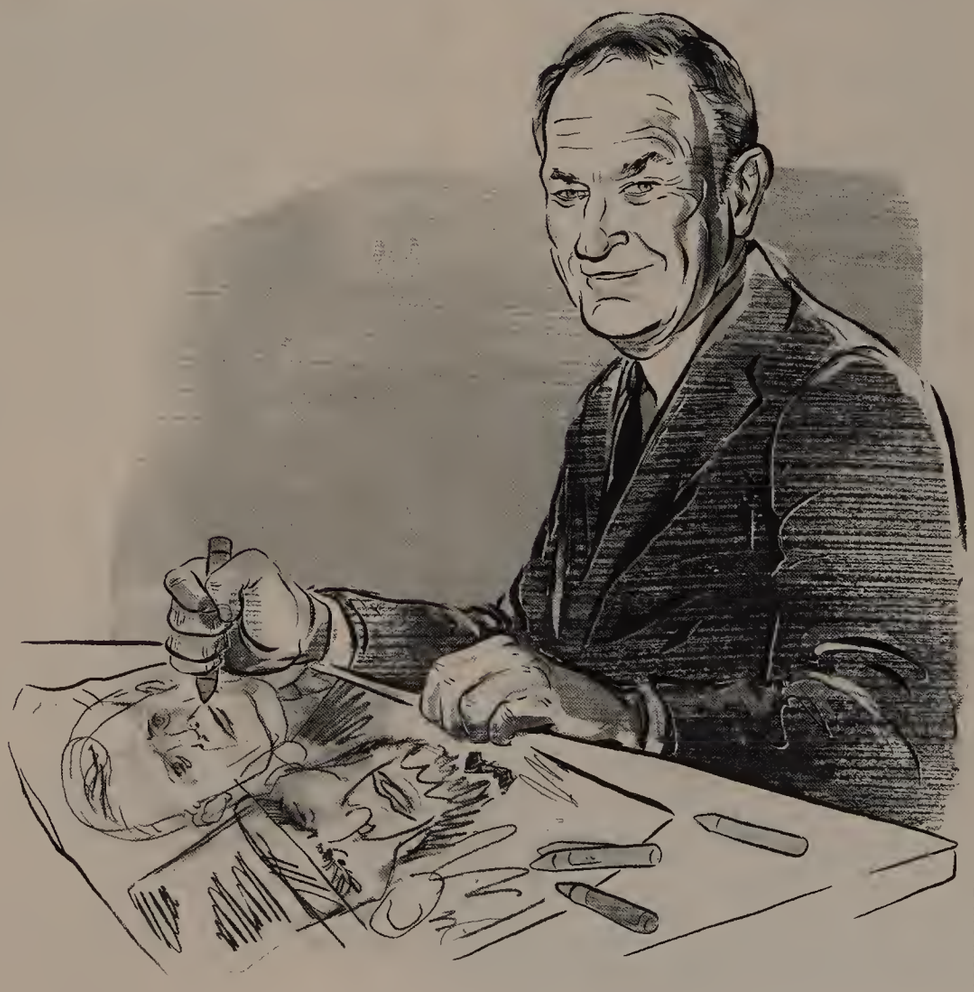
By the time I'd personally contributed to O'Reilly's fortune (yes, I feel dirty), the many and major historical errors present in the first editions of *Killing Lincoln* had been expunged from the record with no reference made to the corrections.

My copy never mentioned Lincoln several times pondering his death in the Oval Office—which wasn't actually built until the Taft Administration in 1909.

The made-up bits about John Wilkes Booth's co-conspirator Mary Surratt being held in isolation with a hood on her head are just gone, like Stalin's ex from the photo album. Poof. Never happened.

What discredited "history" remains in *Lincoln* is extra odd considering the authors' safe, wholly uncontroversial treatment of the JFK assassination. The authors hint at the involvement of Secretary of War Edwin Stanton in a conspiratorial plot that would see him entering the not-yet-constructed Oval Office from the proverbial grassy knoll. No credible historian believes that Stanton was involved. O'Reilly, a former high school history teacher, apparently knows something we don't—like Booth's inner thoughts and dialogue, which are especially grating additions.

Killing Kennedy offers no conspiratorial speculation, save for its occasional smackdown,



JACQUI OAKLEY

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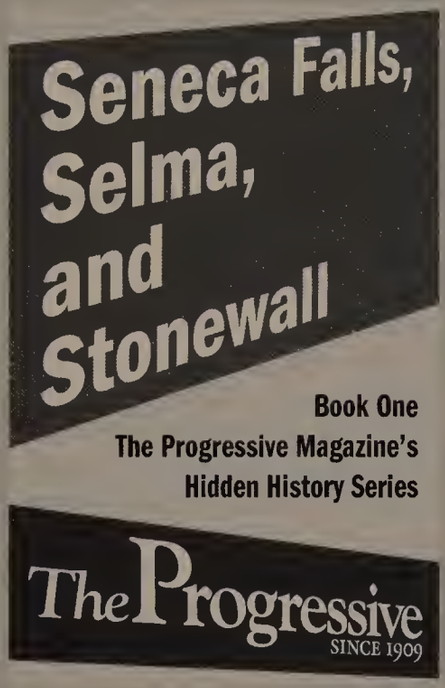

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—*Ruth Conniff, The Progressive's political editor, who put the book together.*

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reading much like the Warren Commission meets a particularly weak episode of *Law & Order: Presidential Victims Unit.*

As we're told in the opening reader notes, much of the research that went into *Killing Kennedy* comes directly from O'Reilly's own reporting from the '70s when he worked at WFAA-TV, for which he was given an award by the Dallas Press Club.

His main subject at the time was a Russian oilman living in Texas named George de Mohrenschildt, whom O'Reilly once dubbed "a crucial link between the CIA and Lee Harvey Oswald." O'Reilly's long-gone award-winning journalism once tied Mohrenschildt to Allen Dulles, the CIA director from '53 to '61 who later served on the Warren Commission, and is widely regarded to have steered the investigation away from the CIA.

But in *Killing Kennedy*, that once spunky reporter is deader than Lincoln. The only juicy reporting we're allowed is one buried footnote about O'Reilly being present at de Mohrenschildt's house, knocking at the front door, in fact, at the exact moment the alleged spook took his own life with a shotgun (or so goes the official story).

Those looking for Stanton-like intrigue in *Killing Kennedy* will be disappointed to find no exploration of well-known inconsistencies regarding blood splatter, entrance/exit wounds, or witness testimonies about second shooters.

Jack Ruby is just an upset patriot, and Jack Kennedy is the simple PT-109 hero whose too-short Presidency includes a by-the-number recounting of the Bay of Pigs, and the mandatory Marilyn Monroe and Frank Sinatra cameos.

In these black-and-white narratives, the suave Booth and crazy Oswald are cartoonishly portrayed as evil personified, and their doomed Presidential counterparts are—mostly—sketched as American messiahs.

I say mostly, because Kennedy's "voracious sexual appetite" is discussed, admonished, and almost admired in some detail—some very poorly written detail describing JFK as riding a sex-crazed "elephant" his entire life. A prurient pachyderm rolling in a moral mud that no loofah or falafel can erase from this "no spin" history.

The morally unambiguous portraits of these Great American Men are meant to inspire patriotism, rather than pinheadism, and impart lessons that are "relevant to all our lives." What exactly these "lessons" are is a mystery . . . unless it's "Don't kill the President."

Such worshipful representations of Presidential character aren't usually O'Reilly's thing. But this kind of soft, hero-loving dramatic retelling of history is Dugard's thing. And one can't help wonder how much of these books Bill O'Reilly actually wrote.

Examples of Dugard's scholarship include *Into Africa*, a Eurocentric Stanley/Livingstone literary soap opera, and *The Last Voyage of Columbus*, which, while acknowledging the ugly fate that will befall the indigenous population, casts the murderous Columbus as a largely innocent adventurer.

One of the more striking assertions of "fact" in either book comes in the comparison between Lincoln and Jesus, for they both died on Good Friday. "Two thousand years after the execution of Jesus, there are still many unanswered questions about who was directly responsible for his death and what happened in the aftermath," Dugard and O'Reilly write.

Unsurprisingly, it's been announced that O'Reilly and Dugard will fulfill their three-book deal with Henry Holt and Company to crucify history with *Killing Jesus.* Having developed an affinity for undead children's characters in third grade, I absolutely cannot wait. ◆

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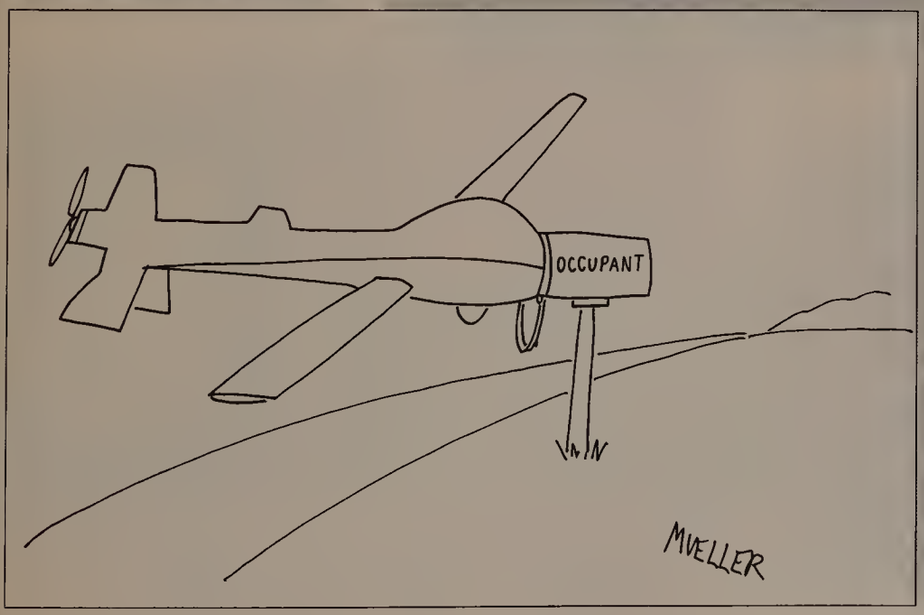

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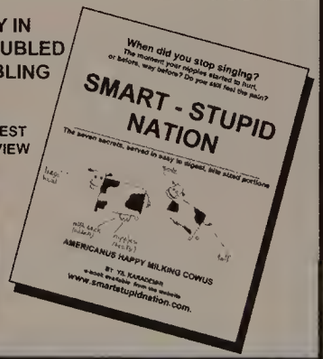

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Vox Populist Jim Hightower

Nine Bucks Won't Cut It

"In the wealthiest nation on Earth," President Obama declared in his State of the Union speech, "no one who works full-time should have to live in poverty."

When I heard him say that, I said, "Way to go!" Finally, I thought, he's put some real pop into populism.

But then came the number: $9 an hour.

Excuse me, Mr. President, but if you're going to bother making the fight, why start out with a number so low that many minimum-wage employees would still "have to live in poverty"?

About 60 percent of America's lowest-paid workers are women, including single moms struggling awfully hard to make ends meet. Yet, at your $9 an hour level, a single woman with two children, would, in fact, be paid a poverty wage. And, since you would slowly phase in the increase, she wouldn't even be paid that until nearly two years from now.

Yes, nine bucks is a buck-seventy-five better than the current low wage of high misery, but it doesn't even elevate the buying power of our nation's wage floor back to where it was in 1968. Nor, by the way, does it match the $9.50 level you pledged to push in 2008 when you were running for President.

This is not merely about extending a badly needed helping hand to people struggling to work their way out of poverty, but also about enabling them to give a bottom-up jolt of new energy to our economy, which it desperately needs. Ironically, while super-rich corporations are hoarding trillions of dollars in offshore accounts, refusing to invest in our nation, minimum-wage workers would invest every extra dollar they get in America—spending it right where they live, on clothing, food, transportation, health care, and other needs.

Yes, I know that Congressional Republicans' idea of governing is first to snarl no and only then ask what the proposal is. So they instantly delivered a loud negative to any wage hike, and when Obama proposed $9, House Speaker John Boehner jumped on it like a gator on a poodle.

JEM SULLIVAN

Incredibly, he claimed that raising the wages of our country's most poorly paid workers would hurt—guess who?—America's most poorly paid workers! This disingenuous pitting of poor people against themselves is derived from a corporate-manufactured political myth that hiking the minimum wage squeezes small business owners to the breaking point, "forcing" them to fire employees or even go bankrupt.

"When you raise the price of employment," Boehner grumped, "guess what happens? You get less of it."

Well, guess again, John. That "job killer" fable has been debunked again and again by real world experience. Over decades, when the pay floor has been elevated by Congress, states, and cities, it has caused little-to-zero negative impacts on job numbers, but very positive results for employee morale, productivity, and turnover. It also tends to generate a nice income boost for small businesses, as wage earners spend their increase in pay in the local economy.

Obviously, the major impact of the raise would be to lift incomes of about eighteen million hard-working people being paid at or near the minimum. This would allow them to save enough to make a down payment on a used car or to enroll in a couple of community college classes. Plus, it would give at least a nod to the essential need of bridging America's dangerously widening chasm of economic inequality.

Boehner was flinging raw disdain at low-wage workers, which they could smell a mile away.

Seventy percent of Americans—including a majority of Republican women (but not men)—favor raising the minimum wage above $10 an hour, according to a poll last June.

So, Mr. President, this is not a time for meek proposals. Think big, and take it to the people. ◆

Jim Hightower produces The Hightower Lowdown newsletter and is the author, with Susan DeMarco, of "Swim Against the Current: Even a Dead Fish Can Go with the Flow."

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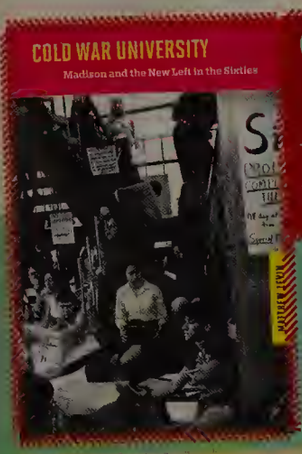

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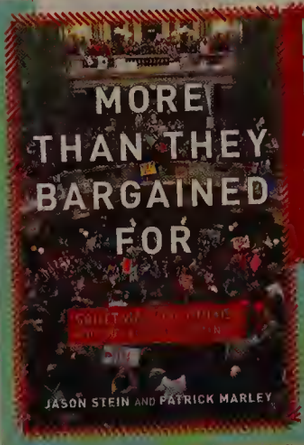

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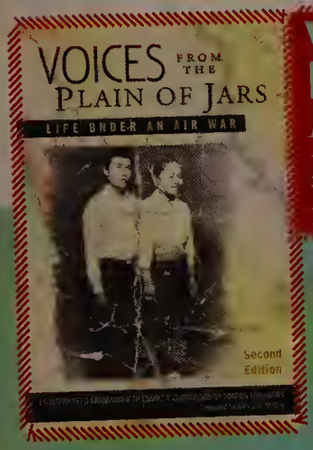

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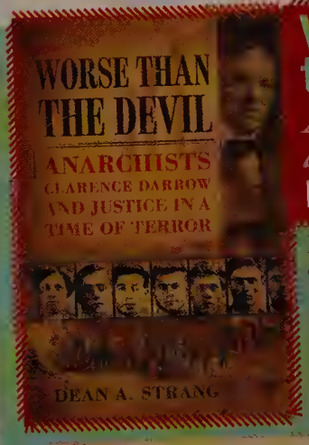

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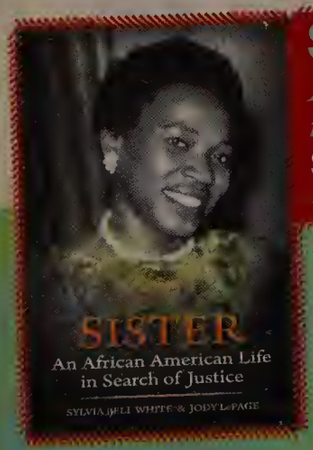

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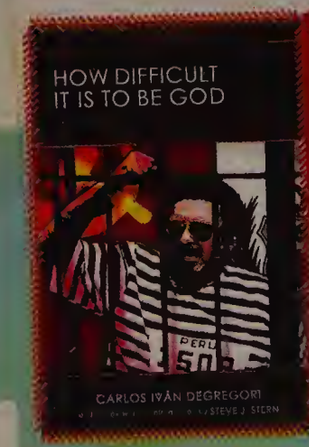

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